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MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW

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- Far Cry 4
- The Order: 1886
- Alien: Isolation

13 REVIEWS INCLUDING

- Destiny ➤
- The Sims 4 ➤
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FEATURE
Inside the
A MAZE
festival

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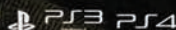
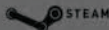


17 OCTOBER 2014



The logo for WWE 2K15 is prominently displayed in the upper right corner. It features the iconic WWE 'W' logo in white with a black outline, followed by '2K15' in a bold, red, sans-serif font with a black outline. The background of the entire image is a vibrant red with white, diagonal, brushstroke-like patterns. In the lower center, the top of a person's head with dark hair is visible, looking upwards towards the logo.

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PS4 & XBOX ONE



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FEATURES

30 INSIDE A MAZE

Local games! International games! Experimental games! Board games! TALKING! This year's A MAZE festival in Johannesburg was a great way to get in touch with the underground side of gaming, and to discover what it'd take to make your own games. Step into our office and we'll tell you why.

52 MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

It's all very complicated, you see. Everything's all orcs this and rings that and dead elves here and kinda-dead Gondorian Rangers there. Also, the Nemesis System. Also also, three-part Sauron. It's probably best if you pop the kettle on and follow us to page 52 so we can decipher the exciting riddles of *Shadow of Mordor* together.

ON THE DVD

DEMOS

Airscape: The Fall of Gravity / Bravada / Exodus / NoLimits 2 Roller Coaster Simulation / OTTTD / Pineview Drive / Rooks Keep / Super Splatters

DRIVERS

No updates this month. Err'ything is fine.

EXTRAS

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VIDEOS

117 game trailers
4 Pop Facts



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Happy October!



October is a special month for me because it contains my birthday and rAge, both within a couple days of each other this year. Of course, my birthday isn't important here (only enough to mention twice), but rAge is, so let me tell you all about it. If you've been before (thanks!), try to play along.

Have you ever been to a LAN, or a particularly geeky gathering? When you arrive, with your arms full of computer hardware, board games, comics and greasy snacks, you're greeted by a scene that you never imagined you'd see: PCs are crammed into every corner; a couple of people are jamming *Guitar Hero* on a console; the techiest of all attendees is fussing over someone's corrupt driver installation; there's a pile of snacks that makes your contribution look like it came from a health shop; someone got into the stock of Red Bull and is being chaperoned by a concerned parent. People you've never met are doing all the things you love to do. Your hobbies and passions are culminating in a single location and you feel overwhelmed by the pure joy that's bubbling up from your usually cold, black heart.

rAge is like that, but a hundred times bigger and brighter. Also noisier, and definitely busier. And unless your go-to LAN party happens at The Ritz, it's also a hell of a lot nicer. Words don't do justice to the incredible feeling of stepping inside The Dome on rAge weekend, and even though I've attended the show every year, and for the last six I've been on the other side of the

fence, I still get giddy just thinking about it. No matter how tired I am by closing time on the Sunday, I always leave the show with a sense of sadness that's only lifted when planning begins for the next year.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

This month's issue is filled with great content (of course), including our mega *Destiny* review. *Destiny* turned out to be quite a different, maybe even special, game, so we decided to give it the space it needs and really get down to the gritty stuff underneath its skin.

On the features side we gave Ben the opportunity to tell you all about the A MAZE festival. A MAZE is a gathering of local and international game development professionals who get together to talk about clever things and play each other's games, but it's also open to the public. I attended this year for the first time and was very impressed. I might even steal a few ideas for the home-coded area at rAge next year, but don't tell anyone I said that.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our cover this month features that dark and brooding dude from *Shadow of Mordor*, and we've got six pages dedicated to our hands-on session with this exciting new title. It seemed a little bit out of place when we first heard about it a year ago, but this one is really starting to shape into something solid, and I must admit that I'm very keen to spend a lot of time with it.

Stay cool, you lovely people! **NAG**

-GeometriX

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Inbox

***DISCLAIMER** / Most of the letters sent to this fine publication are printed more or less verbatim (that means we don't edit or fix them for you slow kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors. It's not us... it's you.

letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month October 2014

From: Roland Allgeier

Subject: Gaming, the perfect escape

Greetings NAG and fellow gaming enthusiasts. I've made a startling realization and though what better ways to share than with like minded people like your selves. I have probably dumped hundreds of hours into GTA 5 which in my book ranks as one of the best games to ever grace gaming consoles. Whilst playing I made a curious discovery. I noticed that in all of my epic carnage sprees, (and don't deny it just like myself

you love nothing more than taking a baseball bat to that hillbillies face or ploughing head first into a crowd in your brand new Cheetah) out of the three protagonists I always ended up using Trevor... So why only use Trevor? Is it because he is a psychotic, mentally deranged lunatic who has no qualm about pulling the teeth of an innocent and has become my perfect escape goat to live my fantasies? The answer to that seems to be yes! It made me realize what a fantastic medium gaming is. Gaming has become every gaming enthusiast's "Trevor" where we can go 300km/h around Nurburgring in a pink Lambo, pull off daring heists in GTA or score that magical hat trick against Manchester United

THIS MONTH'S PRIZE

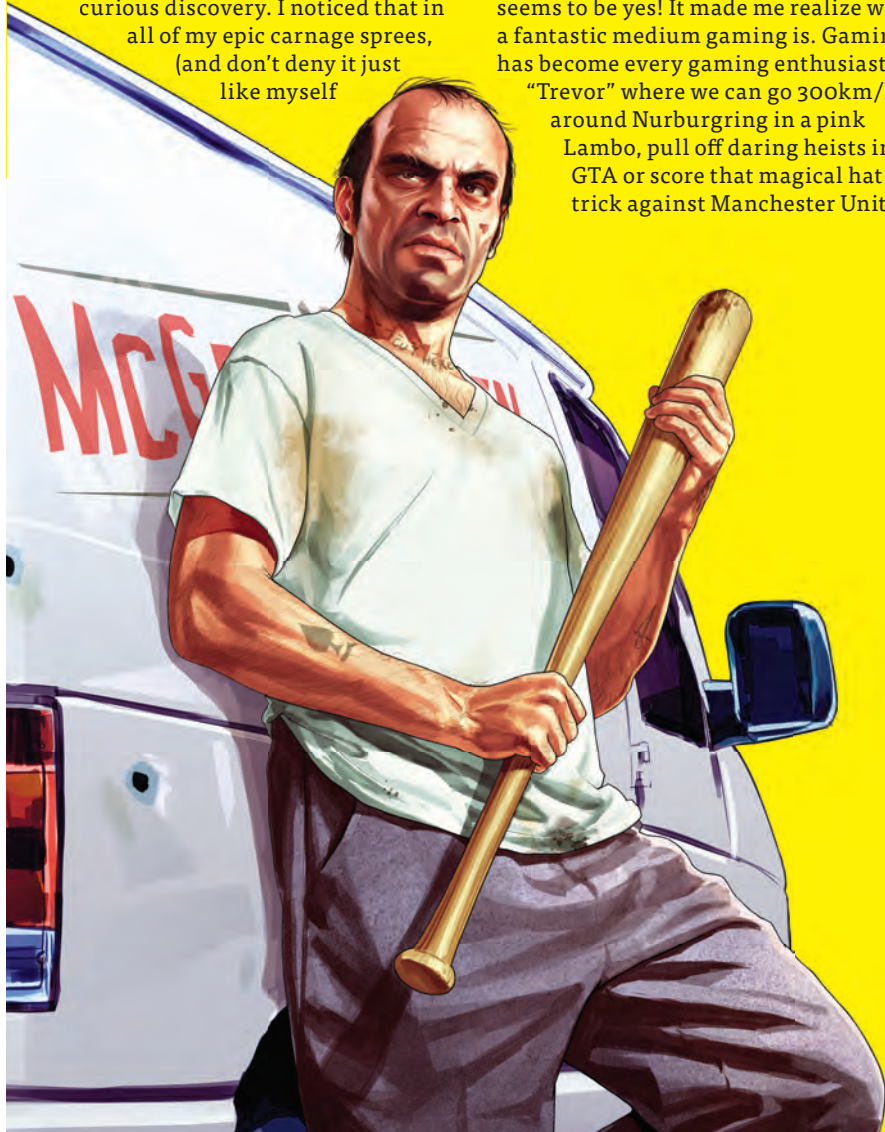
The "Letter of the month" prize is sponsored by the good folks at Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness. **NOTE** / You can't change the games or the platform they come on.



in Fifa 14. It's the perfect escape from the everyday grind. I LOVE GAMING, and as a 36 year old man I have no problem admitting it. It keeps me sane... Unlike Trevor :)

The inclusion of Trevor in GTA V was one of the most deviously clever things Rockstar has ever done. He's the perfect psychopath: unbridled, uncaring and unattached to reality. You're right: he is gaming! When we step into a game we might get sucked in while we're there, but it takes so little to put down the controller and return to life, while our little world of burning, screaming civilians and epic battles sits happily and waits for us to return.

Yes, gaming is a fantastic medium, and I'm glad that at your ripe old age ;) you're still appreciative of that fact. Some of those whipper-snapping, ankle-biting youths running around with their ironic '90s-era attire and short attention spans just don't get how special this hobby is. Sometimes even I forget, and thanks for reminding me. Ed.



From: Daniël Verster

Subject: Cod of Duty

I love Call of Duty, who doesn't right? I enjoyed playing from Modern Warfare up until Black Ops 2 on pc. I decided to give Ghosts a try on ps3 and quickly became accustomed with playing with a controller. Since then my graphics card broke and am unable to play pc games. The problem with Ghosts on ps3 was the number of people playing. I could only play TDM because nobody else was playing the other servers. I'm looking to get Advanced Warfare on PS4. Question is: will there be enough people playing or am I going to be running around on my own? I'm sure there will be a bigger base on pc but don't have the funds for that right now. Do you think there will be enough people playing on PS4? Or maybe there would be more people on Xbox One? Please help!

I'm going to come out with an opinion here that might not be popular: TDM is the downfall of playing CoD online, because, as you say, that's what everyone plays. I enjoy TDM as much as the next person but it gets a bit much when it's either that or super-leet-clan-pwnage in Search & Destroy. All the cool people who pre-ordered CoD in the past got access to the Mosh Pit game mode (an ever-rotating mix of maps and modes) – everyone else is relegated to TDM or S&D. I've heard great things about Mosh Pit, but I'm not a pre-ordering type of person, so I've always felt a little short-changed by the online stuff.

Will XBO or PS4 be more popular? Who knows – it's a gamble either way so just go with the platform that you're most comfortable with. Sorry for being no help at all but thanks for giving me an opportunity to rant. Ed.

From: Kia Moeng

Subject: Is complicated better?

I'm 15. And I've been gaming before I even knew how to spell 'Cat'. When I was about 2 or 3 years old my dad went and bought me a PS2. And the games made in early 00's just seemed simpler. I mean I was a toddler who couldn't even read a sentence. Now games are so realistic that the line between the virtual world and reality has now become blurred. And present games to me seem more complex than they need to be. But one of my all time

favourite games is The Witcher 2, which is obviously more complex than Crash Bandicoot: Wrath of Cortex. What do you think of this new plague or blessing that has come of gaming?

It's a little alarming that your use of the word "cat" contained two errors: an extra space after the opening quotation mark, and an incorrect use of the upper-case "c", but thankfully I'm totally not anal about these things, so I'll let that slide...

If you think that games have become more complex as time has moved on, then it's probably just you seeking them out. If anything, many people think that games today are simpler than those of The Good Old Days, but again it just comes down to where one looks. I suppose it does sometimes seem like games these days try to throw "advanced gameplay" at players to cover up game design that's weak at its core. Eventually those complexities can be figured out and plodded through with enough game time, and it's what's left over that's really important.

ON THE FORUMS

We all have opinions, and sometimes, just sometimes, other people care enough about yours to tell you it's wrong. But nothing like that ever happens on the NAG forums: www.nag.co.za/forums

QUESTION / What is your favourite setting for open-world games? Or, what open-world setting would you like to see in a game?

Golden Age of Piracy in the Caribbean. So many awesome stories to tell and there are a lot of gameplay mechanics that would fit in that time perfectly.

- Shaderow

I tend to like urban environments the most, like GTA. What I would love is a game set in a post-apocalyptic city that is 100% explorable.

- Azraphael

I would figuratively kill someone for a single player open world sandbox RPG set in the Starcraft universe.

- Grasshopper

One word. Space. Everything is possible in space.

- 5h@un13

Or you can forget all of that and grab some classic games. Or just get a Wii U. Ed.

From: David Tee

Subject: Being the bad guy

Have you ever played an open world RPG and wanted to play a real bad guy? Not a good guy who makes all the jerk responses in dialogue, I mean a real villain. Say, you save some villagers from slavers, only to sell them off yourself, or eliminate a thieves guild to make way for your own guild, or save a princess from a dragon, only to ransom her back to the king, or sacrifice her to the dark gods and doom the world to an eternity of darkness and torment...

Ahem, but also, rather than being a weak jerk, be a charming Lex Luthor/Normon Osborne like villain, that most think is a hero. Manipulating the people in the game, defeating the 'real' villain so that you can take over the kingdom yourself in the end.

And no, Fable doesn't count, because in Fable you do end up 'saving' the kingdom anyway. Really, if you're honest, you play a good guy no matter what (technically you



This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at NAG this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the NAG logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.



This month's prize courtesy of Prima Interactive is *Forza Horizon 2* for Xbox 360



Zander Rautenbach, "NAG you guys rock ! Created this in my spare time using GIMP. Took me a couple of hours..."

are a good guy in Dungeon Keeper). There are almost no games where you can be a bad guy, but many where you are a jerky good guy.

It would give players a reason to play the game again, if nothing else, since I obsessively play a neutral good Fighter Thief on my first run through of all games. But then coming back as Daphne the Black-hearted would be cool.

PS Please don't show this email to Tarryn. She scares me.

For starters, go and read Roland's Letter of the Month elsewhere on these pages. If Trevor from GTA V isn't a "bad guy", then I don't know who is. Okay, so GTA isn't a role-playing game, but it's certainly open-world so it's got one box checked.

Then there's the Fallout series. Or specifically, Fallout 2. The newer games are decent but they felt like they missed that grittiness of the original games. In Fallout 2 you can rescue villagers under attack by slavers, only to enslave them yourself. You can sell drugs to street children, then pickpocket them to steal back your illicit goods. You can bribe, sleep, sneak or fight your way through most situations. You can make friends with important people and leverage them to rise to the top, then turn around and condemn them. And the best thing is that you don't even need to finish the game: you can just arb about, doing horrible things to equally horrible people (or nice people).

PS: I'm not sure if Tarryn even reads this section, but in the off

chance that she does: I also don't like the Fable series. I used to, but I'm over it now. Too many broken promises. Ed.

From: Dylan Warwick

Subject: The week in which my birthday occurred

ABSEILING! To the readers of this... You have to do abseiling!

Oh yes what now? Uhm yah, I just got back from my compulsory Gr 11 camp in Cradock. Yes, I spent 5 days of my life in Cradock. And yes, I abseiled down a 47m cliff (1st of my group and it was in the morning).

That icy wind on your face, the cool feeling of being suspended by a rope that can hold 100 times your weight (well, my weight). When you've done it, you really feel like you're on top of the world, like you're invincible, like you've conquered death itself (appropriate, seeing as I was playing Diablols before i left). It was a high of a different kind (unlike the poff-adders' high, this one was Soba Cobra (my group name (you see what I did there (yes i like brackets (I should stop this now))))).

But it was quite strange to be so far from civilization, where the most complicated thing i had was a multi-tool (and the communal hot-water urn). But at least I survived (on two-minute noodles, tea and cuppa soup).

After the DMC-laden bus trip back, I wasted R40 on 2 ice-creams, got home, and upon my bed lay this months NAG, and a cheque from my Aunt for R10 000 (Thank you). Best 2 birthday gifts ever (along with

THE SHORTS

[extracts of LOL from the NAG audience]

"You guys are just amazing ! Thank you all ! You've given me three years of happiness !"
— Connor

"Keep up the good work and Tarryn Van Der Byl stop swearing!!!"
— Kerry Neve

"Please do some proper work next time."
— Flip

the shmexy Hellfire Mantle skin in GW2)

Duuude! That sounds wicked super cool. I'm totes envious. The most outdoorsy thing I've done in ages is going camping the other day. I really enjoyed it though, so maybe I'll work my way up to abseiling (hah!). Thanks for the injection of motivation and your almost entirely arbitrary contribution towards these pages. You are an inspiration to us all. Ed.

ON TWITTER

@nagcoza 

Miklós Szecsei

Thanks to a vicious rumour printed in the current issue of @nagcoza, I now have people Tweeting D20 pictures at me.

Dillon Pretorius

@nagcoza So Windows 9's Siri is Cortana... that's amazing XD. Now if only SteamOS would use Glados. Should then rename the OS to PotatOS.

Soul Brother No:1

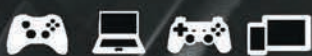
@nagcoza I note this day, the end of the world: 10/SEP/2014 00:32 My favourite Xbox controller had an 'accident'. Curse you #UFCUndisputed3!

Shiven Premdayal

Cleaned all the fans and my case in my PC. Now it's purring like a Lamborghini. Ready for @nagcoza LAN.



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THE GAME STALKER

by Pippa Tshabalala

Why can't we all just... get along?



It seems this is my annual obligatory rAge Expo column. I didn't intend it to end up this way, but I realised that I write something about this event every year. And why shouldn't I? It is the biggest gaming event in the South African calendar, so it makes sense that it's what will be on everyone's minds in the weeks prior to the event. For the first time in my memory it's moved dates as well. Usually taking place on the first weekend in October, this year it's moved to the second weekend in order to accommodate the school holidays, which while completely understandable, doesn't really work well for me, because as a result this is now the year I'm not attending – for a completely valid reason of course, but nevertheless I am somewhat disappointed that I'll be missing out. I think this might be the first rAge I've ever missed. Certainly in the last eight years at least.

The annual (and ever growing) cosplay event, the NAG LAN, the showcase of local game developers, the competitive DGC LAN, not to mention a first chance for many to see the Xbox One in action, which launches in South Africa just before rAge – these are just some of the highlights of rAge 2014. There are also always loads of upcoming game releases on display, and I highly doubt this year will be any different.

Expos such as these are so highly anticipated that in previous years the venue has actually closed its doors in order to comply with health and safety standards because there were just too many people. And people tell us that gaming isn't that big in South Africa. Think about it – these are primarily people from Gauteng, as rAge isn't a travelling expo. Almost 33,000 people through the doors last year. Let that sink in. Thirty-three. Thousand.

Nevertheless, there seems to be an international trend after these kinds of expos – I've seen it happen after rAge, after E3, after Comic Con – to bash the etiquette shown to women, to cosplayers as well as a couple of other groups, in the weeks following the expo.

Last year we saw a disturbing number of complaints and incidents after rAge regarding the groping of female cosplayers and the destruction of costumes, and regularly after conventions such as E3 and Gamescom we see articles about the treatment of female journalists and developers at these events.

Why is this? What disappoints me the most is that you'd think events such as these would unite gamers in their love of video games, not give them reasons to harass each other and fight among themselves. Does it really give you great satisfaction to mock and try to destroy the costume someone spent hours making just so you can feel better about yourself? Or show off to

your friends? Do you have such a need to come out at the top of the pile that you'll quite happily put other people down in order to feel better about yourself?

I think we need to discuss some social niceties. And these things really aren't too hard to get your head around. How would you feel if you were supporting your favourite football team, you'd spent a fortune on the jersey (because damn, anyone who follows football knows that the jerseys are expensive!)

"... no matter how many measures are put in place, there is always some idiot who causes trouble..."

and people came up and started ripping it and mocking you. Pretty pissed off? Yeah, so imagine how people feel when they've MADE their costume and you come along and destroy it and make fun of them.

Let's move on to the next issue that plagues many female cosplayers. Groping. You wouldn't appreciate it if someone came up and started groping you, invading your personal space, or your girlfriend's for that matter; so again, why is it acceptable for you to do the same? Do you stop to think that while you consider it very funny, it's actually a gross violation of the other person's body and their space?

What's worse is that no matter how many measures are put in place, there is always some idiot who causes trouble and honestly, unless they're caught red-handed, there are so many people at rAge that the organisers really can't do anything about it. Sure, they can keep a look out for the offender, and they can ask people to please not harass the cosplayers, but following that there isn't really much that can be done.

This year let's give some thought to making this a complaint-free rAge. Peace, love, harmony and all that jazz. **NAG**

TAURUS: Your game saves might be corrupted this month. You can fix this bug by installing the game's DLC.

Notch packs up, sells out

Minecraft finds a new home with Microsoft



Mojang, the studio behind *Minecraft*, has been sold to Microsoft. The deal comes shortly after rumours circulated about the sale, and it's now all been confirmed by Mojang in a recent blog post on their website.

The deal will see Mojang and all its licences (including its other, lesser-known game *Scrolls*) being transferred to Microsoft for a staggering cost of \$2.5 billion. Many of the company's developers are likely to stay on under the new ownership, should they wish.

It's unclear at this early stage what will become of *Minecraft*, but for now its upcoming release on PSV is still going ahead. It's very likely that we'll see Microsoft sculpt and change the lucrative franchise into something far larger than it is now. Heck, we'd be willing to bet that a sequel is no more than two years out.

As for Notch, Carl and Jacob – the original *Minecraft* team – they're out

the door. Notch reportedly struggled for some time to reconcile *Minecraft*'s success with his own far less lofty goals, and this is obviously the kick that he needed to move on and do whatever it is that he wants to do.

In his final farewell, Notch humbly states that he doesn't see himself as a real game developer.

"I've become a symbol. I don't want to be a symbol, responsible for something huge that I don't understand, that I don't want to work on, that keeps coming back to me. I'm not an entrepreneur. I'm not a CEO. I'm a nerdy computer programmer who likes to have opinions on Twitter."

But it's his closing statement, "It's not about the money. It's about my sanity," that really sums it up. We wish him all the best in a future that'll involve balancing his personal goals with a ridiculously large fortune and a reputation as the most successful indie developer to date.

Icwind Dale getting a fresh coat of paint

Now that they're done sprucing up *Baldur's Gate* and its sequel with their respective Enhanced Editions, developer Beamdog has turned its attention to revitalising another CRPG classic: *Icwind Dale*, which was originally developed by *Fallout* creators Black Isle Studios. Beamdog are improving the user interface, adding in new items and spells, and are including six-player cross-platform multiplayer.

Icwind Dale: Enhanced Edition will deliver new quests (built from cut content that Beamdog found in the original's files) and will obviously also support modern resolutions. UI enhancements like the ability to zoom in and out, as well as a quickloot bar, will worm their way into the list of upgrades. For people who're only interested in the game's excellent story, there'll be a very easy "Story Mode" difficulty to choose. It's set to cost \$19.99, and should be out soon – possibly even by the time you read this.



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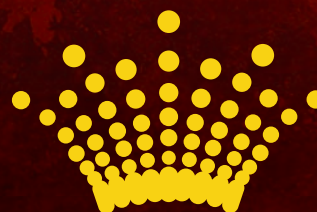
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CANCER: You may unlock a secret weapon this month. Or maybe you won't. Maybe that'll only happen next month.

I, GAMER

by Miklós Szecsei

R.I.P, gamers – you won't be missed

I guess I'm a misogynist. I'm probably a shameless sub-class of misogynist because I didn't really realise I was one to begin with; people who are oblivious to character faults are often the worst perpetrators. I can say that I've never *actively* played the misogynist, but by me identifying myself as a "gamer" I, by contemporary standards, need to admit that that also means I'm a misogynist. It's a confusing awakening – I've always been particularly fond of women and have never actively done anything that would suggest otherwise. Passively, however, is where the problem is.

I've played (and enjoyed!) a disturbing amount of video games that contain casual misogyny. Get onto YouTube and watch Anita Sarkeesian's "Tropes vs. Women in Video Games – Women as Background Decoration: Part 2" to realise what I'm talking about. I cringed the whole way through as example after glaring example was highlighted – I hadn't even noticed before, and that's embarrassing. It has made me more critical of this medium we all enjoy so much.

"We all enjoy so much"

Do we? It seems like there are a lot of angry people. "Gamers" are angry because the industry is changing as the audience changes. "Games are for everybody" is the mantra popping up online as additional angry male gamers spew further threats of murder, rape and abuse towards women in video games. Dan Golding's article *The End of Gamers* hits the nail on the head: the "gamer identity" is dying. *People* now play video games; it's a pastime that is no longer championed by straight white man-babies. I'd argue it hasn't been that way for years already, but as the audience and industry becomes more critical of the medium and the misrepresentation that's endemic to it, so change is being enacted, and that change is causing the stalwart "gamers" to get angry. That embarrassing anger reached fever pitch a few weeks back, and it resulted in people actually fearing for their lives and going into hiding. It was the saddest moment I've seen in this industry and it led me to the realisation that I no longer want to refer to myself as a "gamer". That label, if it ever was innocent and pure, has been irrevocably tainted by the actions of many these last two months.

Gaming is no longer *our* pastime – it's everyone's. And if everyone is doing it, there's no need to identify oneself as a "gamer". It's like identifying yourself as a "breather"; it's superfluous and stupid. I agree with Dan Golding: the era of the gamer is over. Let it die and take with it all its devolved negativity, toxicity, and misogyny. The industry is in the throes of a massive social metamorphosis, and the bitter, angry "gamers" who don't grow with it can die alongside their label and be forgotten. We're not losing our identity – the rest of the world is just adopting whatever good is left in it; those parts that seem to have been forgotten about.

It's time to change the name of this column. **NAG**

Nintendo reveals new, improved 3DS



As has already been spoiled by that headline, Nintendo recently unveiled a new model of its 3DS handheld, literally called the New Nintendo 3DS. The company also showed off the New Nintendo 3DS LL, which shares all of the improvements of the new 3DS but boasts a larger 4.88-inch display. The standard new 3DS has also had its screen size increased from 3.5 inches to 3.88 inches. The new 3DS is finally adding a right analogue nub to the device's design, situated directly above the four face buttons. This eliminates the need for the Circle Pad Pro add-on.

In addition, you'll find two new shoulder buttons (labelled ZL and ZR) alongside the existing two. Nintendo claims that the 3D viewing experience has been improved, and the new models feature faster processors that'll improve overall performance. Built-in NFC will ensure that the system supports Nintendo's upcoming Amiibo figurines. SD cards are replaced by microSD, and the replaceable battery will apparently get you around seven hours of gameplay on a single charge. The first exclusive that'll make use of the improved hardware is a port of Wii RPG *Xenoblade Chronicles*. The new 3DS will launch in Japan this October, with no release dates given for other territories.

Where there's smoke, there's Firewatch



The lid has finally been lifted on indie supergroup Campo Santo's debut title *Firewatch*. It's a first-person mystery set in Wyoming in 1989, and it casts the player as Henry, a fire lookout in the Shoshone National Forest. Campo Santo's goal with the game is to explore what it means to be completely isolated from the world, and to explore the psyche of someone who would willingly choose to be isolated.

With isolation in mind, you'll have little to no human contact in the game. Your closest companion is Delilah, your supervisor, with whom you'll be in radio contact. Players will drive Henry's relationship with Delilah, choosing how to respond to her interactions with you – or choosing to not respond at all. Your responses (or non-responses) will have an effect on the course of the story.

Campo Santo is quick to point out that there are no branching storylines or multiple endings – this is primarily a mystery game after all – but they want players to feel as though they have agency to react to situations around them as they choose. It sure sounds intriguingly different, and the game's gorgeous art style is wonderfully alluring. We're anxious to get our paws on it.

Samsung and Oculus VR are strapping phones to your eyeballs

The makers of the Oculus Rift branch into mobile

For the last year, Oculus VR and Samsung have been quietly tinkering away at bringing virtual reality to mobile devices. At first this might sound odd: how does a mobile phone provide a VR experience? It turns out that Oculus VR chief technical officer John Carmack was thinking similar questions. The result: the Gear VR headset.

This new accessory device (which is being developed in parallel to the Oculus Rift VR headset – don't worry, that's still going strong) is basically a wireless Oculus Rift but without a screen. The screen comes in with Samsung's Galaxy Note 4. The front of the Gear VR pops off to reveal a slot that a Note 4 snaps into, thereby turning your mobile phone into a mobile virtual reality headset. All of the head tracking, lenses and 3D effects are powered by Oculus VR tech. The low latency screen required

for an immersive VR experience is handled by Samsung's Note 4, which sports a 5.7" quad HD (1440x2560) AMOLED display.

The Gear VR has a volume control, touchpad and back button so as to navigate the Note 4's operating system while it's attached to your face. Samsung is pre-loading Note 4 handsets with a selection of 360 degree

virtual movies as well as a collection of 3D movie trailers. A number of games have already been announced and demoed, including a VR version of Imangi Studios' *Temple Run*, and a puzzle game by *Monument Valley* developers Ustwo Games called *Land's End*.

Interestingly the Gear VR will be out before the end of the year, but in an "early-access, beta version of the device for developers and enthusiasts rather than a final consumer product," Oculus said.



Destiny experiences the biggest new franchise launch in gaming history

Bungie and Activision's *Destiny* launched across the globe on 09 September. Less than 24 hours after the game went on sale, Activision released a statement saying that they had shipped over \$500 million worth of *Destiny* stock to retailers around the world. This amount of initial stock was based off pre-order figures and projected demand. This makes *Destiny* officially the biggest launch of a new IP.



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VIRGO: There will be many chests for you to open this month. None of them will look like chests though.

MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

The creator in us all

I have an older sister that I grew up with during a portion of my childhood. Not all of my childhood, due to divorced parents and us being split between the two. But a good portion, none the less. We lived together during the NES era, and she enjoyed “teefee speletjies” as much as I did. Her tastes were a bit more specific though, things like *Rainbow Island* or *Bubble Bobble*, whereas my tastes were “anything I could get my grabby hands on”.

As time went on, she continued playing games, mostly on the PC. Role-playing games like *Septerra Core*, and of course *The Sims*. Though in the case of *The Sims*, she spent more time making hand-made objects that could be imported into the game than playing the game itself. I've not seen my sister in person since I left South Africa in 2008, but we still keep in touch somewhat. She's five years older than me, so next year will be the big four-oh for her. She's married now, and even had a baby in spite of protests growing up that she never would. She gave her little girl our mom's name, which makes me feel pretty good. My sister and I lost our mom to a car accident when I was 13, so we both carried that around with us for a long while.

In spite of her advanced age (I kid, I kid!), my sister recently emailed me asking if I could check out something she'd been working on. It's a game she made, though it's not yet complete. My sister has no programming knowledge, so it's made in the free RPG Maker you can get off the Internet. It's an RPG in the style of older *Final Fantasy* games, but the premise involves a zombie apocalypse. Nothing overly serious, more *Plants vs. Zombies* style zombies than anything else. I was surprised at the humour in her little prototype. There's something kind of neat about the zombie theme, but dressed in her jovial and lighthearted take on the situation. Kind of like *The Walking Dead* meets *Hello Kitty*.

I think it's important that we create things. We're a species that have the capacity to create not for survival, not out of some pre-programmed lizard hindbrain instincts, but just *because*. At some point in humanity's past, a Neanderthal (or even earlier) was banging two rocks together or stamping their feet and enjoyed the rhythm of it. Even today, we as a species are entranced by a beat, which might not be surprising considering our own life runs on the beat of our heart. The first thing we hear, unborn, is the beat of the carrying mother's heart.

Gaming as a hobby, has the side-effect of using up free time. We turn to games to entertain us, engage us, challenge us or just to pass the time. As a result, even with myself, I see games eating into a space that would have otherwise been used for creative pursuits. One can be creative playing a game, of course. But we shouldn't lose sight of creating things just for the sake of creating. And if anyone asks you, “how are you going to make money off that thing you're making”, you're free to punch them. They've got no soul anyway, if that's the first thing they care about. **NAG**

The Behemoth's next game is Game 4



The creators of *Alien Hominid*, *Castle Crashers* and more recently *BattleBlock Theater* (which are all, in case you're wondering, mighty fine games) have announced their fourth game, and it's appropriately codenamed *Game 4*. The Behemoth's co-founder Dan Paladin describes the game as a fast-paced (but turn-based) cooperative adventure game with management and role-playing mechanics.

The Behemoth's trademark humour will be apparent in every aspect of the game. The story involves a gigantic space bear crashing into the Earth and plunging the planet into chaos. The bear's blood causes the space-time continuum to go all screwy, mixing the history of Earth with the history of other planets and their alien inhabitants.

Players take turns moving across the game world (which is divided into a hex grid), and along the way they'll encounter a variety of enemies (like grumpy cupcakes) that can be engaged in combat. You can recruit party members (such as a friendly half-Cyclops) to accompany you in battle. Occasionally a torrent of bear blood will rush through and completely alter your surroundings, so you'll have to drop a trail of poop to remember where you've been. No, we're not making this up.

You had me at XCOM

Battle Brothers is an upcoming medieval-themed turn-based strategy title. What makes it stand out is that it gives off a definite *Jagged Alliance/XCOM* feel. The game sees you creating a squad of mercenaries and leading them across a procedurally generated map, battling various nasties (like zombies and vampires and other fantasy foes), levelling up your troops and bagging yourself some fancy new equipment along the way.

Towns dot the strategic map, which can be visited to resupply your nomadic band of warriors. Battles look to be quite tactical, with unit positioning and use of unique skills proving vital. The *XCOM/Jagged Alliance* vibes creep in when you realise that veteran troops will become indispensable, and having to train up a new recruit after you've lost your favourite swordsman is likely to offer the same gutting sense of loss that those games evoke. The game's got a pleasant board game look and feel to it as well, which we like.

Back from the dead

Atari digs deep into its bag o' tricks



Hot on the heels of news that Atari Interactive is breathing new life into the *Rollercoaster Tycoon* franchise with *Rollercoaster Tycoon World* (due out on PC next year), the publisher recently announced that they're digging into their extensive IP catalogue to revive and reimagine two dormant horror franchises: *Alone in the Dark* and *Haunted House*.

The new *Alone in the Dark* is subtitled *Illumination*. Powered by Unreal Engine 4, the game uses *Alan Wake*-style third-person combat mechanics in that the horrors you'll face in the game can only be dispatched by bathing them in light before riddling them with bullets. Levels will be partially randomly generated; enemies won't spawn in the same place twice, and room layouts will alter on each excursion. For the first time in the

venerable *AitD* series, *Illumination* is set to feature online multiplayer, offering cooperative play for up to four players.

Haunted House, meanwhile, is definitely the more obscure of the two brands. There's not an awful lot known about its upcoming remake, other than it's played from a first-person perspective and there'll be puzzles to solve. It's being put together by DreamPainters, the Italian studio responsible for PC horror title *Anna*.

Both games are due out later this year, and considering that there's not much of this year left, that's an incredibly quick turnaround time from announcement to release. Atari COO Todd Shallbetter says that people should expect to see more classic Atari properties reimaged to cater to a modern audience.



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Watch Dogs is still coming to Wii U

Well butter our biscuits – we honestly thought that this game would never hit the Wii U. Originally released in May of this year, Ubisoft's open world hacking adventure was meant to launch on all gaming platforms. The Wii U didn't get it and instead that version was delayed... for quite a while. It's now finally making an appearance on 21 November, just in time for the holiday season. The Wii U GamePad will act as an offscreen map, or can be used to play the game without a TV.



Take your epic RPGs to go

Final Fantasy has a solid history when it comes to releasing on mobile devices, and now Square Enix is trying something a little more advanced. If VR is the next big thing, then streaming is the current thing that's still trying to measure up, and Square Enix believes that the next step for this tech is on mobile devices. In Japan, at least.

Come October 9, the publisher will make a few of its games available for streaming play on mobile devices through an app called Dive In, exclusively for the Japanese market. The games included are *Final Fantasy VII* and *XIII*, *Season of Mystery* and *Murdered: Soul Suspect*, which can be digitally rented for three days to a full year. Each game will include a free 30-minute trial.

There's no telling yet if this technology is likely to leave Japan anytime soon, but if it does, consider us adequately intrigued. It'd certainly do a lot to mitigate the performance/visuals gap between mobile and console games.



iPhone ready for MOBA action



Unless you've been living in some sort of elaborate cave system for the last month, you're probably aware of Apple's recent announcement of the iPhone 6. The reactions were the expected mix of joyous hymns and sneering pokes from both sides of the fence, but from the gaming perspective things are looking good.

With a more powerful iPhone comes improved capabilities for mobile gaming that's creeping closer to something we'd expect to find on console or desktop, and *Vainglory* from developer Super Evil Megacorp (we love the name) seems like it's right there with the pack leaders. Looking like an action-focused, somewhat simplified version of *Dota 2* or *LoL*, *Vainglory* is a 3v3 MOBA from what we can tell from the trailer. It's expected to release in October.

Other developers and publishers on board for iPhone 6 game development (and likely equivalent Android devices) are Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Disney, Square Enix, Vector Unit, and 505 Games. Now that the hardware is getting there, let's hope these teams can push the gameplay closer to the level of games on larger devices.

Warner Bros. delays PS3 and 360 versions of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

Middle-earth: *Shadow of Mordor* was supposed to launch across multiple platforms on 03 October for us here in South Africa. Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive has unfortunately announced that the last-generation versions (i.e. the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions) have been pushed back by about six weeks. Those of you itching to play the game on older consoles will now need to wait until 21 November. By the time you read this, the game will likely be out on PC, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One.



Dino doodoo takes a dive



Dino-themed multiplayer survival game *The Stomping Land* is the latest Early Access title to face trouble, as the game has officially been dropped from the Steam Store for purchase. This comes sometime after the developers, SuperCrit, all-but disappeared from the Internet without a word.

In June this year, SuperCrit apologised for the long delay in communications and updates to their promising but certainly incomplete game. They said then that they're "ready to stomp" after a bout of personal issues. Many players accepted the apology and strapped on their optimism hats, but after more months of no-shows, Valve has decided to step in and make

the game no longer available for purchase (it's still listed though) in an effort to protect any further damage to both customers' wallets and the developer's reputation.

This is the third time that Valve has taken action against non-performing Early Access titles, the other two of which were *The War Z* and *Earth: Year 2066*.

The Stomping Land was originally successfully Kickstarted in which they pulled in \$114K – nearly five times their goal of just \$20,000 – more than a year ago in June 2013. The game has since been host to a slew of bugs, hacks and roughly-implemented features, and sadly it seems like it might never be more than that.

Japan is not loving the Xbox One

Poor Microsoft; they really can't seem to catch a break in Japan. The Xbox One launched in Japan on 4 September, but hardly made a splash with its first week. In fact, it had one of the worst console launches in Japan's history and only managed to shift 23,562 units in four days. Back in 2005, the Xbox 360 shifted 62,135 units in the first two days of sales in Japan. If you're wondering, the PS4 sold 322,000 in two days in Japan.



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Capcom keeps at it

Between its original release on the 3DS and the HD remake on PS3 and 360, *Resident Evil: Revelations* impressed us greatly – probably because it felt more like a classic *RE* title than anything else we've seen in recent years. Not ready to give up on the series just yet, Capcom is gearing up for *Revelations 2*, which is set to be an episodic series. Each episode will be a few hours long and will be released in weekly intervals, with the lot being bundled on a disc at the end along with some bonus content, to be sold as a retail or standalone downloadable package.

Each episode will sell for \$5.99 (about R65); a season pass will cost you just \$24.99 (R275). The fun should kick off in early 2015 on PC, PS3, PS4, 360 and XBO.

But the zombie-slaying fun doesn't stop there! Capcom is also in the process of porting across the very first *Resident Evil* to the above-mentioned platforms, with updated HD textures and tweaked character models from the already updated GameCube/Wii version (which was itself a port of the PS1 release).

As well as the visual improvements, there's a dynamic camera to help smooth out the exploration elements of the game (although it's still anchored in the environment; it won't be like the *RE5* camera). This remake is also set for a 2015 release.



Set the date



Rockstar has finally confirmed the release dates for *GTA V*'s trip into the current generation, and if you're primarily a PC gamer, you're not going to like them. PlayStation 4 and Xbox One owners can look forward to seeing their favourite threesome on their tellies on November 18 2014. PC players: you'll have to hang on until January 27 2015.

Given Rockstar's history, the decision should come as no surprise. The team has often been vocal on the impact of PC-based piracy on their games' sales, so it's likely they're trying to score as many legitimate customers before it's unleashed on the world of PC gaming. Whatever your chosen platform, you can expect this current-gen re-release to feature all the HD textures, harder-packed details and NPC numbers you'd ever want, as well as exclusive content and goodies for you to find, drive and destroy in the game.

Sega and Gearbox enter litigation over *Aliens: Colonial Marines*

We promised ourselves we'd never print the words "colonial" and "marines" in *NAG* magazine again, but we're going to have to break that promise. Publisher SEGA is taking developer Gearbox to court in response to Gearbox attempting to back out of a class-action lawsuit. Recap: in August last year, SEGA and Gearbox were hit with a class-action lawsuit that claimed the two misrepresented *Aliens: Colonial Marines* at trade shows and in trailers. That lawsuit went badly for SEGA and Gearbox, and the result was a tentative agreement between the plaintiffs and SEGA that would have seen the publisher pay \$1.25 million. That proposed settlement was

offered to Gearbox, who would have had to pay in an additional \$750,000 to absolve them from any further lawsuits pertaining to *Colonial Marines*. Gearbox refused that offer and in fact moved to have themselves removed entirely from the lawsuit. They then claimed that all marketing was handled by publisher SEGA so really, Gearbox shouldn't be involved at all.

Fast-forward to the present and SEGA has now filed a court case against Gearbox saying that they have evidence that Gearbox (and specifically CEO Randy Pitchford) played significant roles in falsely marketing *Colonial Marines*.

Things could get ugly.



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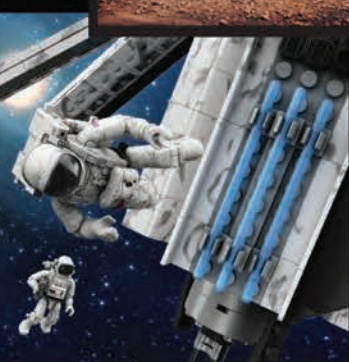
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EA and Maxis utilise clever anti-piracy method for The Sims 4



Piracy on the PC isn't going to go away. This means that developers and publishers have begun implementing clever ways of nailing pirates who download and install illegal copies of their games. Electronic Arts and Maxis have now become the latest companies to include some unusual methods of combating piracy. In *The Sims* franchise, whenever a Sim goes to the toilet or takes its clothes off, nudity is blurred out by a little square of pixels. Once the Sim has its kits back on, the censor pixels disappear. What

EA's *Sims 4* copy protection does is ensure that those pixels never actually disappear, and in fact they grow increasingly larger until the entire game world is blocked out.

This led to a bunch of people taking to the game's official forums to complain about a "censor bug". Of course in doing so they outed themselves as pirates. Awkward. EA said that they have no intention of assisting those who are reporting this "bug" and they suggest people go out to buy a legitimate copy instead.

Team Fortress 2 poster used in Russian documentary on WWI propaganda

Russia's Channel One recently showed a series on the various types of propaganda posters that were used by the West during World War I. Unfortunately, the historical show clearly didn't do enough research because they utilised a *Team Fortress 2* poster as an example. Oops!

The poster was created by an artist on DeviantArt called TankTaur. It was designed in response to Valve's 2009 updates to the team-based shooter. That update fleshed out the backstory of a number of *Team Fortress 2* characters and initiated a rivalry between the Soldier and the Demoman classes. Valve prompted players to pick a side and the result was the creation of many fan-made pieces of art such as the one that was mistaken for actual World War I propaganda.



Chucklefish comes down to Earth



Starbound developer Chucklefish has revealed a new project that it's working on alongside the studio's flagship title. It's called *Wayward Tide*, and it's being worked on by a separate four-person team within Chucklefish. It ditches the spaceships and randomly generated aliens in favour of pirate-flavoured, semi-cooperative treasure hunting for two to four players. We say semi-cooperative because, in the spirit of pirate-y mutiny, players can stab their friends in the back in order to reap greater rewards for themselves.

Working together means you'll survive longer (and if everyone dies, everyone suffers), but being the lone survivor at the end of the game means you get to keep all that delicious booty for yourself. Chucklefish give the example of a pressure plate that all players must step off at the same time, to prevent a boulder from crushing the players left standing on it. Areas will be randomly generated when they're entered, and Chucklefish will support mods by publicly releasing their development toolset shortly after release.

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Warner set to take on the big players

Warner Bros. looks set to launch its own competitor to Steam, if the rumours, patent filings and bits currently showing on the WB site are anything to go by.

It's called WB Play, and from the patent filings it's likely to be similar to the likes of Steam, Origin and Uplay by offering services that include "online retail store services", "audio and video broadcasting services" and "downloadable virtual goods". Of course, Warner also has a huge repository of films that would be a great way to bulk up its offerings and set itself apart from the competition, should it choose to do so.

This news comes right on the eve of the release of the highly-anticipated *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* (so anticipated that we put it on our cover this month!), which could well be the first title to support the software. It's likely that *Mortal Kombat* and *Injustice* would tag along for the ride, too.



Caption of the month



Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random

game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of **Sacred 3** for Xbox 360 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "**October caption**".

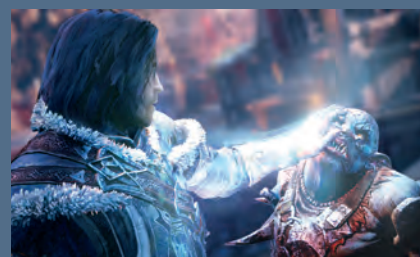
Dying Light has a birthdate



We've had our eyes on *Dying Light* for ages. Between our hands-on time at Gamescom in 2013 and the few gameplay trailers that have surfaced over the last year, it's certainly shaping up to be a solid title with its mix of brutal combat and agile exploration, and now, finally, Techland

has announced a release date that they feel comfortable with.

That date is sooner than expected: 30 January 2015. *Dying Light* is set for release on 360, PC, PS3, PS4 and XBO, so don't go spending all your holiday money in December.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR

"In nomeni patri et fili spiritus sancti."



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

"This is what you get when you ask Lady Gaga to create a music video." - Dirk



SUPPORT LINES

Got a legal boxed game and need some technical help? Before you call please do the following. Update your system software, drivers and have a look online for a game patch. Just these simple tasks eliminate 93% of all problems – it's a made up statistic but probably close enough.

PUBLISHERS / Activision / Blizzard
2K Games Rockstar / Ubisoft /

Codemasters / NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai / Disney
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Telephone / 0861 987 363

PUBLISHERS / Microsoft Xbox
Telephone / 0800 991 550

PUBLISHERS / Electronic Arts
e-mail / zasupport@ea.com
Telephone / 0860 EAHLP/324357

Roxy hunt

Send your sighting to **letters@nag.co.za** with the subject line “**October Roxy**”, and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize. Feeling lucky punk?



July winner

Brogan , page 70

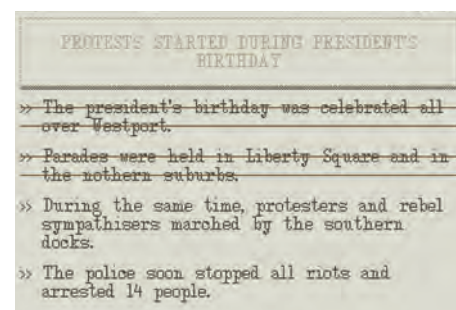


This month's prize

Marvel Dice Masters valued at R225. Sponsored by Skycastle Games.



(News) Papers, Please



STOP THE PRESSES! Get it? Because it's a game about a newspaper. Never mind. *The Westport Independent* is an upcoming game that sees you at the helm of an independent newspaper which is about to be shut down thanks to the passing of a new government bill. As civil unrest begins to rise amongst the populace in response to growing government oppression, it's up to you to decide what should be censored and what can safely be printed in your paper.

Originally conceived in 72 hours for Ludum Dare 29, its developers have opted to flesh out the concept and turn it into a full-fledged game. They promise it'll contain a plethora of new features, including many more management systems and a much more dynamic city of Westport. What you choose to print will affect the people of the city, altering the course of their actions, and thereby altering the content you'll have to work with in future.

The team of journalists you employ is comprised of individuals with their own opinions, personalities and families who depend on them, and they'll openly voice their approval or dismay at your decisions if they feel you're endangering their lives. Obvious comparisons can be drawn to indie hit *Papers, Please* and the way it turns the seemingly mundane activity of border control into an utterly compelling and strangely emotional gameplay experience.



home_coded

EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

GEMINI: Its best to take a break from gaming this month. Your magic find is at an all-time low.

YOOHOO, YOUTUBE!

Lague is in Grade 11 and has no special insider connection with foreign devs. What does he have? Well, a series of tutorial videos on YouTube (video channel Sebastian Lague) which his artist found before approaching him for a collaboration. The channel has 14,000 subscribers and is well-spattered with very popular videos.

Skills in video making are becoming increasingly valuable nowadays – having a strong YouTube presence can open a lot of doors and works well for giving “wow” material to your press releases. It’s one of the quickest and most convincing ways to demonstrate your game idea and avoid sinking into an ocean of others.

Video making also becomes a vital skill if you want to submit your game to certain sites and services – such as Kickstarter.

Chronicle of the 72-hour piggies

Ludum Dare 30 has come and gone, sporting the usual bunch of entries from South African game developers. One of the most notable projects to come out of this batch has been a 3D space hermit simulator called *This Little Piggy*. The game is about as weird as it sounds (interesting enough to not spoil here – look for the project page on www.ludumdare.com or www.makegamesa.com), but perhaps the most notable aspect of this project is how well-developed it manages to be.

The typical Ludum Dare competition is a game jam lasting either two or three days, during which developers around the world create games focused on a particular theme. This produces a lot of rough and bare-bones work because... well, time!

Sebastian Lague, the South African coder behind *This Little Piggy*, has been entering rapid game development competitions for years and only recently connected with the SA development community on his LD29 entry, *Infection*. Both games have similar

characteristics: lovingly-crafted 3D with startling levels of detail and mechanical interaction, mixed with a little experimental flavour.

Working with Brazilian developers Daniel do Nascimento and Thiago Adamo, the sheer amount of work that goes into these projects has secured Lague some early and meaningful admiration in the local community, as well as favourable coverage from Ludum Dare peers and reviewers like *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*.

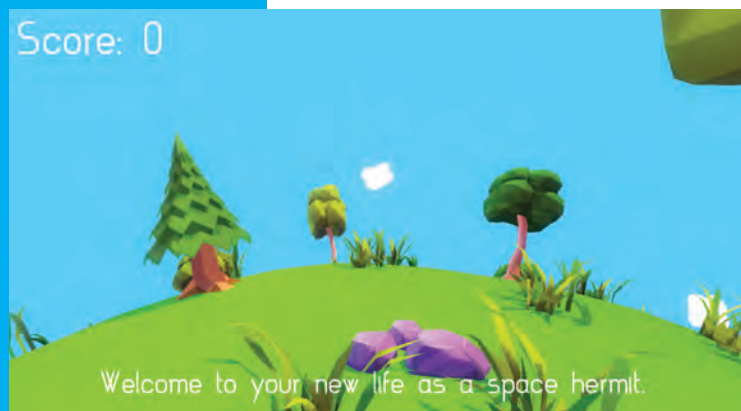
Given how much of an impact raw content and polish can have on peers and audiences in the jam community, it’s worth looking a little more closely at some of the rapid game development techniques that Lague uses.

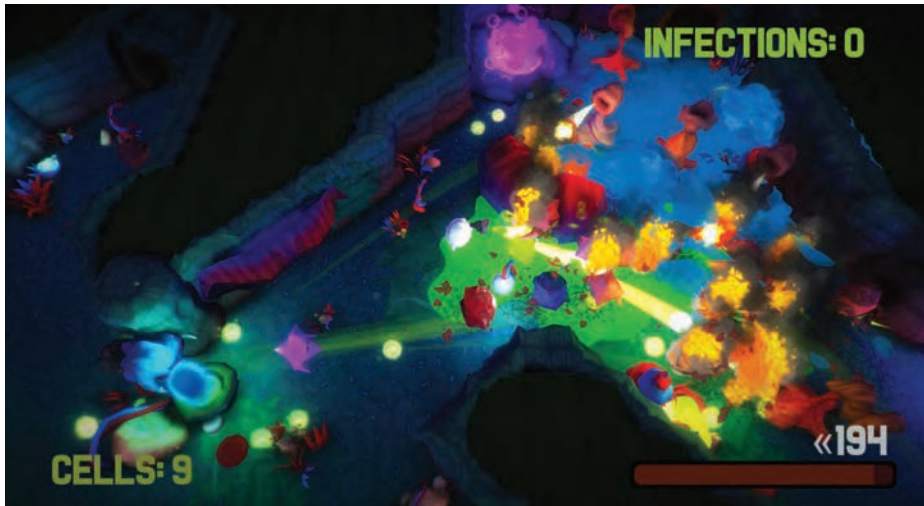
ALL ABOUT THE PREPARATION

One of the allowances that many game jams give to developers is the ability to bring in limited code templates for average tasks. This means you don’t have to drag yourself through boring-as-hell tasks like button coding, menus and other grunt chores that just about every game needs as a usually time-consuming demand.

It pays to sit down in advance and think about the sort of “code stubs” and other resources you’d want to bring in, not just for the competition itself but as a great base for any other prototypes you want to create in the future. Having a collection of random sprites, for example, gives you placeholder art when testing a new idea. Common sounds and musical stings can give your early drafts a bit of audio flavour and help the feel along.

Take care when using these resources in a competition setting and see the rules for what’s acceptable in any given case. For general prototyping, these common shortcuts are a great way to get something out the door more quickly.





TEAMWORK

Unless you're in a specifically solo event, co-ordinating with your fellow developers is of vital importance. Becoming acquainted with some sort of version control tool (Subversion, GIT) isn't strictly necessary, but it's super helpful.

In Lague's case, the trick shot of working with remote developers added some other workflow considerations. In cases like this, it can often be super helpful to work on a mini-project before the event starts to warm up and understand people's methods.

Creating shared spreadsheets and documents (using Google Drive, for example) can also help the team organise their ideas and keep co-ordinated. These can include notes on individual elements that will help a team member do their job more effectively – preferred formats, warnings about restrictions, and particular feature requests.

It's also good to understand what sort of bottlenecks exist in a project and fight against those. In some cases, the sound person is left waiting on the coder to update and test some new wave files *in situ*. Lague tries to help his team with this by placing sound hooks in places others can easily reach.

BEING UGLY

As Lague himself puts it, "By the end of Ludum Dare, I am always mortified to have my source code seen by a fellow programmer." In short time frames, it's vital to let go of perfectionism and deliberately seek shortcuts or rough work where necessary.

An impressive Ludum Dare game is rarely sculpted perfectly. Individual sprites may be amiss, areas of code are slightly weird and some sections of music will feel dull and repetitive. This isn't the best work of anyone involved – but it's the most efficient. Catering to future problems or striving for perfection is death when time pressure becomes that relevant.

The sort of people who play Ludum Dare games are also the sort of people who understand what kind of quality can be expected from 48 hours. Don't sweat the small stuff too much. Your project just needs to *work*.

SOME OTHER COOL TRICKS

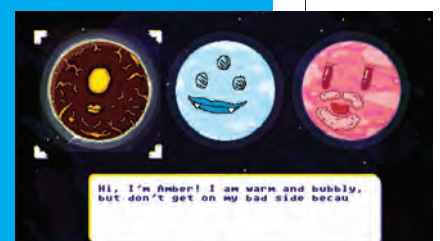
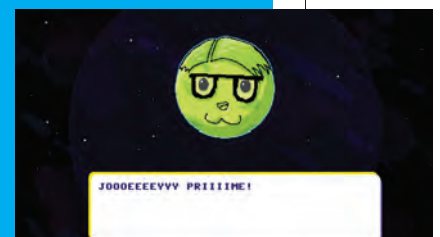
- As Lague finds game balance one of the trickiest and most time-consuming parts of development, he'll often expose some code values that other team members can adjust and experiment with on the fly without having to dig into his code.
- By saving the menu screen for last, his team can recycle graphics from the game itself for a good background.
- The average planning phase is 2-3 hours long, after which the team locks down the basics, mostly splits up, and gets to work with relatively minimal communication. Having conversations briefly and efficiently is important.

Ludum Dare comes around every few months and comes packaged with a variety of challenge tiers. To find out more, visit www.ludumdare.com.

HONOURABLE MENTION: STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

Three-man team Ben Rausch, Jason Sutherland and Ryan Mazzolini made this entry for the 72-hour jam and single-handedly raised the bar for dating sims forever. The game involves helping lonely planets court one another. Seriously.

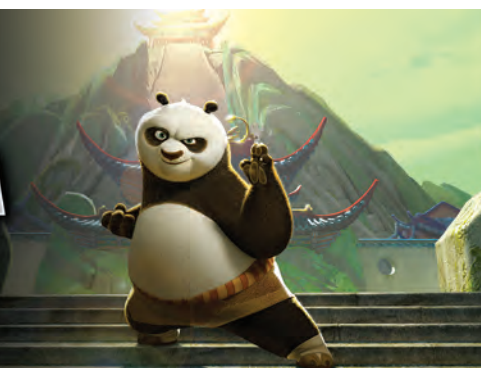
Rausch and Sutherland cracked a mention last month for their work with *Kick In The Door*, and are quickly earning a reputation in the local community for their quirky work. Mazzolini runs the community sound competitions held every few months, each testing a new sound design skill. You can find these projects on www.makegames.com.



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Inside A MAZE

Jo'burg CBD has been undergoing reform for a few years now, slowly rejuvenating what was once an incredible cosmopolitan environment in the face of a repressive society back to its multicultural glory. The reform has brought the restoration of creaky bars, installations of wood-panelled coffee shops, and hipster markets that bring “culture” and a reason to visit and explore the revitalised city centre of Braamfontein.

Nestled on the fringes, close enough for the high-waisted pants and bearded men to still be visible, but far enough to keep some grunge, is the magical, wondrous, and edgy A MAZE festival. The A MAZE festival started originally in Berlin, but now runs an annual version in Johannesburg and is the single most important thing to happen to game development in South Africa besides Make Games SA.

So what is A MAZE? The tagline of the festival is “Games and Playful Media”, and there are plenty of both those things around, but A MAZE is not about those things merely being exhibited for you to engage with.

Instead, it's a festival about immersing you in the process of how indie games (and games generally) are made, letting you play games as they're still being developed, and it's about putting those games' developers in reach. A MAZE Jo'burg is a festival all about demystifying game development, about meeting your game development heroes and realising they're just humans too. A MAZE Johannesburg is about making anyone who attends believe that they too could make games. This year, A MAZE took place from 10-13 September. We were there, and these are our experiences.



THE GAMES

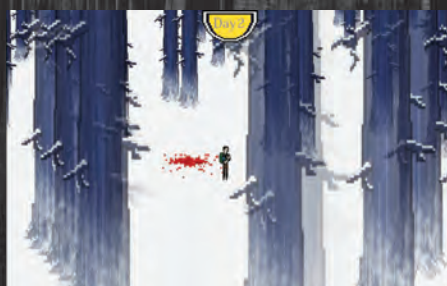
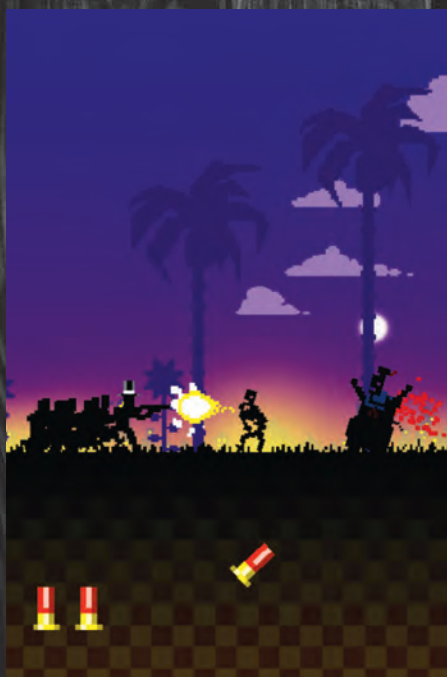


Cadence

Cadence, a beautiful and emotive audio puzzler was by far the most impressive game at the festival – for a South African game to claim this title among international games such as *Nuclear Throne* is no mean feat. The game has you connecting together nodes of varying functions in order to create an eternal loop of sound. Upon completing the puzzle you are rewarded with a piece of music that is so tranquil that it lulls you into a trance. The developers say there will also be a composition element to the final game, allowing players to create their own puzzles and customise the puzzles' sounds. The developers also say that they want to have *Cadence* enable developers to make music for their own games using the game itself. This puzzle title by SA studio Made With Monster Love's future development relies heavily on how well their October Kickstarter goes, so prepare to back them!

Dead Run

The endless runner genre is one that appears will never die, and perhaps appropriately, *Dead Run* is a game about sending the dead back to their earthy graves. This post-apocalyptic game has you running endlessly and trying to save as many survivors as possible. There is a delightful tension as you play each round, waiting painfully long to see whether the next NPC is a human survivor or zombie. Killing the former will end the game, while smacking the latter will allow you to continue your endless journey, collecting as many survivors as you can before you perish. *Dead Run* is a runner with exquisite art that changes as you play, a charming sense of humour, and a mechanic that will keep you interested longer than you might believe. The company behind it, South African studio Two Plus Games, says it'll release on mobile in the next couple of months.



Metamorforest

"Walking round the hood, looking for some wood" goes the rap song that creepily plays over what appears to be your avatars blood on the snow. The song's first line is a pretty effective summary of this game, really. You're essentially walking around a snowy forest looking for wood, fire, friendship and food in order to survive an environment that continually shifts and changes. It is a simple enough game mechanically, but the magic of *Metamorforest* is the effective manner in which the game's atmosphere is portrayed. It's so deeply unsettling that the entire game tends to put your hairs on end – and you'll truly feel fear when you're out of wood and the darkness sinks in. Considering it's made by Ben Crooks, a Wits game design student, it's unclear where the game may go, but hopefully he'll take it further.

Zombie: Blind Rage

An instant classic of the modern local multiplayer movement, this zombie game has you holding a PlayStation Move controller and using it to shoot zombies as they approach. The catch is that whoever is holding the Move controller/gun is completely blindfolded and therefore cannot see the screen. They are therefore relying on the vocal guidance of those around them to direct them to shoot the enemies accurately and in a 360 degree radius before they are killed. Both being the killer and those directing the carnage is incredibly fun. This Dutch game by Glitchnap is currently in development, with no confirmed release date.

Out of the box

Part of A MAZE's core goal is sharing information between international and local game makers, and one of the ways this is most effectively done is through the workshops. This year included workshops with themes from making games for the Oculus Rift to making custom controllers (like big buttons you have to sit on, or controllers for a Mexican band). It also included a multi-hour workshop on creating sound effects using materials from the real world by *Nuclear Throne's* audio designer.

On one day of the festival, the workshops were replaced with a micro-jam, a three hour attempt to make a game with the theme "Tokoloshe". What came out of it most notably is a four player local multiplayer basketball game, *Child Ball*, where you play as Tokoloshes and use a small child as a ball; if left for a few seconds, the child will try to run away from the players. Off key games like this are part of the magic of A MAZE's game exhibit generally, with weird and experimental games lining the entire floor. Some of the other strange and wonderful experimental games at the exhibit range from a game that you have to play with a hard hat and hit the keyboard with your head, to an endless runner game controlled entirely with a cowbell, hooter and microphone. There was even a Kinect game where you have to match your body to the positions on the screen in order to be "The Perfect Woman". The games at A MAZE aren't things you can usually buy off the shelf – they're all about exploring the boundaries of games – and while that does sound pretentious, the games are usually



Board games

The festival is focused on the digital side of games and playful media, but this year had a healthy and brilliant collection of board games. All of these games were locally made, which makes their excellence even more exciting. One student game was particularly enticing: it's an unofficial board game version of *Pacific Rim* that has four players playing as countries and trying to defeat the Kaiju (giant monsters) before they breach your main city. Other highlights included Megan Hughes' *Worst Warriors*, a game where each player plays as a goblin and has to give themselves items to battle all the other goblins – the clever interface allows you to actually place the items on your goblin and see the changes they make and the wicked humour is brilliant. Another particularly interesting board game was *After Robot*, a game that has four players acting as taxi bosses that must take over control of Johannesburg's streets. The wondrous design of the map means by the end of the game, the entire board is blocked up, and it is difficult to move anywhere, making you empathise with the mind of a taxi driver in rush hour traffic. It's great to see board game development evolving locally, hopefully future years will continue to have excellent analogue

A baby fish from *Nuclear Throne*.
Look how cute it is, look at it!



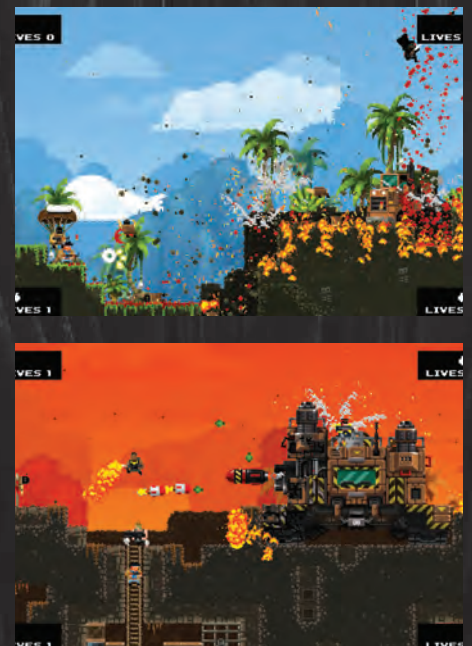


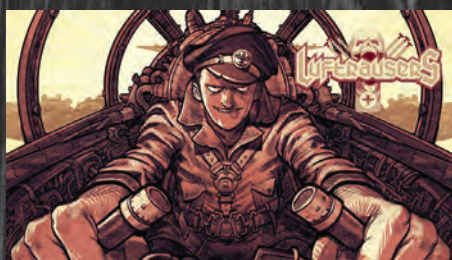
games at the festival.

The Talks

In addition to the workshops, there were also talks by an impressive array of speakers throughout the festival. The line-up included a talk from Rami Ismail, a big voice in the indie games scene. Directly after his talk, he also participated in a panel about indie games journalism, which was an incredible insight into both the developer and journalism side of marketing indie games. The South African contingent also provided some excellent talks, from IGF award-winning game designer Rodain Joubert talking about "Treating narrative as game design", to *Cadence's* Peter Cardwell-Gardner detailing how to effectively use sound in games; finally, Free Lives' Ruan Rothmann spoke about how Steam Early Access had worked out for *Broforce*. This year an entire delegation of Swedish game developers attended the festival, and spoke about their perspective. Their speakers included developers who had worked on *Far Cry 3* and *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* and hit indie games such as *Stick it to the Man*.

One of the most exciting and fully attended parts of the talk line-up was the "hypertalks". These were 10 five minute long slots wherein developers could talk about anything they want. Each talk starts with the entire audience shouting "3, 2, 1, START!" launching the speaker into a panicked and swift talk. Topics ranged from "satire as a unique SA aesthetic" to "the downsides of fame" to a talk that had the speaker playing *Super Hexagon* the entire time he spoke. Having the hypertalks close out the festival was an excellent way to cover a broad range of topics and have the festival's content end on a high note.





The party

While the workshops and talks of the festival were all excellent, one of the best parts of the festival was the social element. The walking proximity of the festival to the hip side of Braamfontein meant that much of the festival involved talking over a craft beer and then heading back to the festival to play some incredible games. Additionally, the A MAZE parties are something of a legend in local game development circles – and this year's parties will add substantially to the legend.

While the word "party" might make most of you think about large burly men in over tight V-necks, A MAZE parties are utterly different. They involve loud music, sure, but this is music played by the creators of some of your favourite indie game soundtracks. This year had the musicians responsible for the *Luftrausers* and *Nuclear Throne* soundtracks, in addition to the sound guy from *Broforce* who played his entire set using a Nintendo DS. The music is an incredible mix of 8-bit sounds and melodic beats; if they won't get you dancing, they'll at least get you twitching in retro glee.

The parties also involve little more than playing awesome games with a beer in your hand, usually while alongside the developer of the game you're playing. This year was particularly geared towards party games, with a nearby pool emptied out, repainted and games projected onto the

bottom. The closing party consisted of a *Broforce* deathmatch tournament with live announcing and commenting from Joonas Turner, the voice of *Broforce*. The parties are a great way to meet some of your favourite indie game developers, chat to them about their games and buy them a beer in appreciation of the joy they have brought to your life.

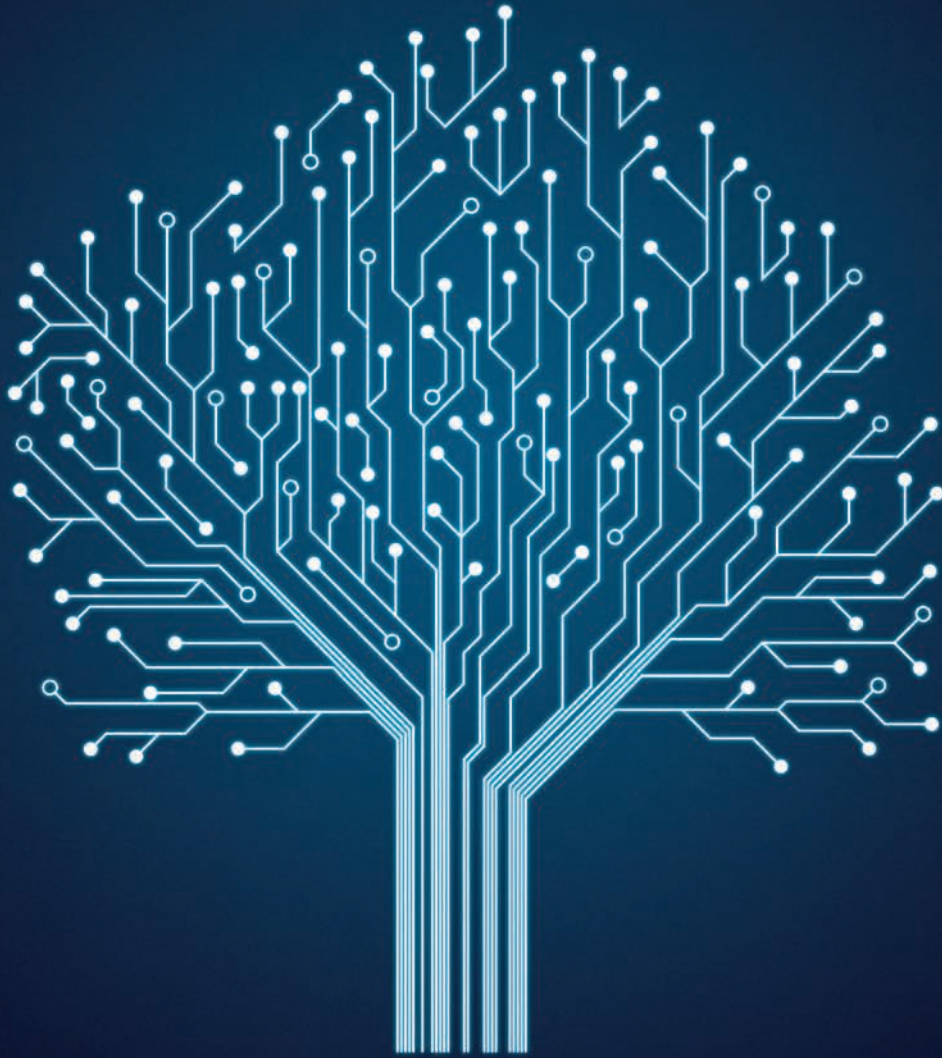
What the Fak'ugesi?

This year's A MAZE was also the first time the festival was under the branch of the Fak'ugesi Digital Arts Festival, and it has made a big difference. The festival was bigger, better, and had more international guests than ever before. The involvement of Wits University, the European Union and even Google to name a few shows that some big names and companies are interested in the festival. The festival this year was incredible and the involvement of these institutions shows a potential for expansion in future years. **NAG**

- Bensonance

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Batman: Arkham Knight

Be the next-gen Batman

When Rocksteady and Warner Bros. released *Batman: Arkham Asylum* in 2009, they struck digital oil. The series rapidly established itself as one of the defining IPs of last generation, and with next year's *Arkham Knight* the series is being catapulted into a new generation of hardware. And it shows. Hands-on time with *Arkham Knight* was, to be frank, one of the best experiences I had at Gamescom 2014. About five minutes into my time with the game (I think it must have been the individual beads of water that were dripping down Batman's cowl thanks to Gotham's relentless rain) I had this wonderful realisation: here was the "next-gen" everyone had been crowing about.

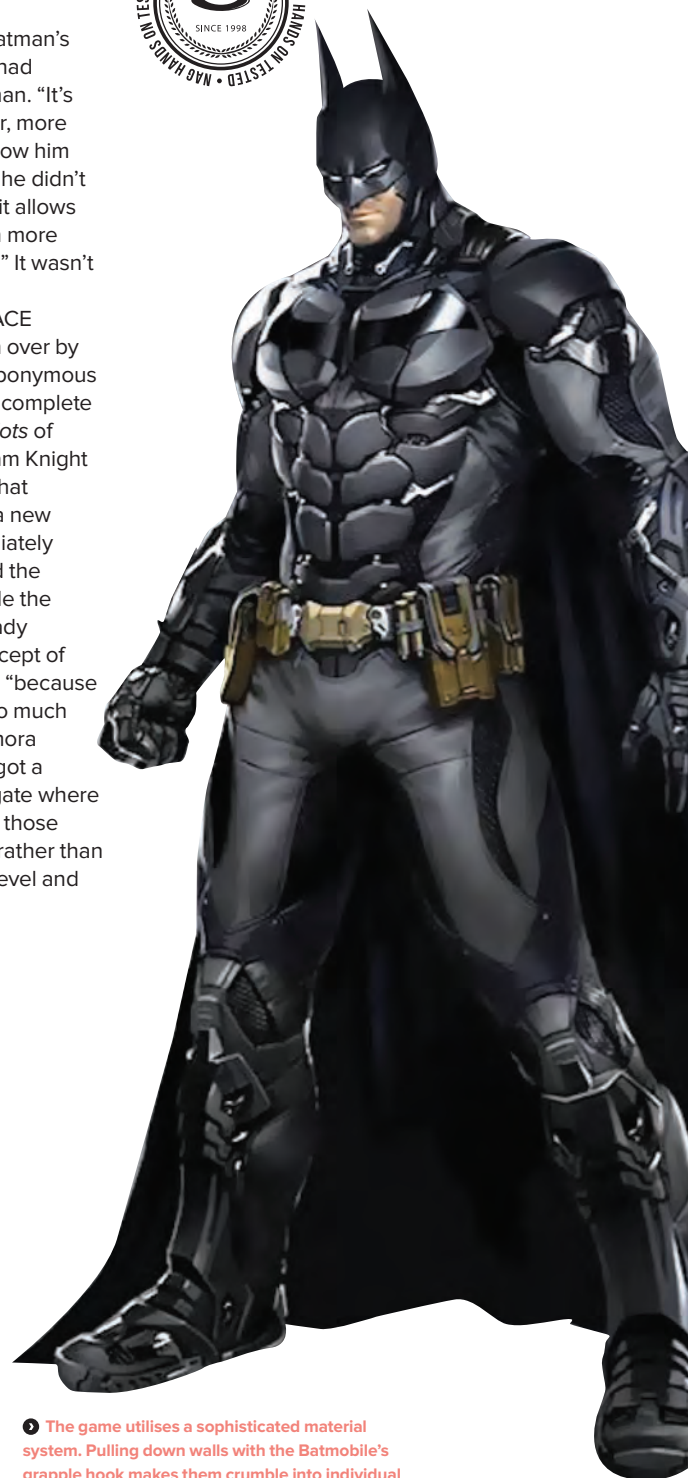
With Ernest Zamora, the game's senior producer, seated next to me, I settled in for a guided hands-on with one of 2015's

"I got a bristle of excitement realising that this one area essentially represented just a single building in the whole of Gotham City"

most anticipated titles. "So this is Batman's new Batsuit," Zamora told me – he had spotted me staring at the new Batman. "It's got segmented armour so it's lighter, more durable, stronger. The segments allow him a greater degree of movement that he didn't have before. And what that does is it allows for him in *Arkham Knight* to be even more dangerous... if you can believe that!" It wasn't long before I did believe that.

Our mission was to infiltrate an ACE Chemical plant that had been taken over by *Arkham Knight* and his army. The eponymous enemy has a large army by his side complete with high-tech tanks and men with lots of guns. At Scarecrow's behest, *Arkham Knight* had overrun the chemical plant so that Scarecrow could use it to produce a new fear toxin. Familiar elements immediately

appeared: we used the grapnel gun to scale the walls, but Rocksteady has added the concept of Seamless Grapple: "because *Arkham Knight* is so much more vertical," Zamora explained, "we've got a better way to navigate where we're able to chain those grapples together rather than stopping on each level and grappling up."



1 The game utilises a sophisticated material system. Pulling down walls with the Batmobile's grapple hook makes them crumble into individual bricks all reacting properly thanks to an excellent physics engine. Metal doors buckle, bend and eventually pop off hinges.

With the courtyard of ACE Chemicals thoroughly occupied by tanks, we opted to access a computer terminal to gain further intel. It was being guarded by three soldiers, but with Batman making use of floor-level grates we were able to sneak up on them. I then got a taste of another new feature: the Scare Takedown. This allows you (as in previous games) to burst out of grates to take down an enemy in slow-motion; while this is happening you can now swivel the camera to tag a second and third enemy for Batman to take out in quick succession. A more dangerous Batman indeed.

With a terminal hacked and Oracle granted access, we soon learnt that a number of engineers had been taken prisoner. There was no telling where however, and the only thing to do was to reach the tallest part of the structure to use another one of Batman's new gadgets: the Bat Scanner Batarang. Flinging one of these gadgets out from our new perch resulted in the camera pulling away from Batman and bringing the entire ACE Chemical plant into view. The hulking structure loomed in the pouring rain as the Bat Scanner looped the perimeter. We were looking for signal blips that we could then tag to pinpoint the location of each hostage. "Look at how small Batman is up there," Zamora said, pointing



RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORM / PC / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Rocksteady Studios

PUBLISHER / Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

WEBSITE / www.batmanarkhamknight.com



❶ Rocksteady set the bar in terms of third-person fighting mechanics with the original *Arkham Asylum*. That combat system remains largely unaltered for *Arkham Knight*, but it includes contextual environmental takedowns now as well.

to a minute Bats perched on top of the ACE plant; the scale in this game is staggering, and I got a bristle of excitement realising that this one area essentially represented just a single building in the whole of Gotham City.

Fortunately, one of the hostages was just below us, so we leapt off the building and glided down towards a window. In true Bats fashion we just smashed straight through it and rolled seamlessly into combat with a handful of guards. Combat feels just as good as previous titles, but the animation and choreography is far more detailed. With the guards unconscious we soon turned to see that the first hostage was already dead. It wasn't all for nought, however, as this room contained the switch to open the main gate to the plant.

It was time to bring in the Batmobile.

Batman's ride is a monster – a hulking mass of black metal and burning rubber ready to expunge crime from the streets of Gotham. Holding the left trigger causes the vehicle to shift and morph in segments until it rides taller and protrudes a cannon. This is Battle mode. Releasing the left trigger puts the Batmobile into Pursuit mode. It handles exceptionally well, with Battle mode allowing you to strafe left and right and Pursuit mode allowing you to control the vehicle like you

would any other car in a racing game.

Controlling the vehicle remotely, I ramped into the ACE Chemicals courtyard and proceeded to lay waste to Arkham Knight's unmanned tanks; they exploded in glorious detail, showering particle effects around the courtyard. With the tanks out of the way, Bats swooped down and entered the Batmobile. Guards were now no match thanks to the vehicle's rubber bullet riot cannon; no killing, remember?

It was during the second hostage rescue attempt that Arkham Knight made an appearance. He is, for all intents and purposes, Batman's doppelganger; his opposite extremity; an evil double. The character himself (which has been made specifically for *Arkham Knight*) is all about killing Batman. He comes across as sinister – a character drunk on the power that his military might and technological advancements have given him. He's also wonderfully detailed, with the glowing blue lights of his HUD shining ever so slightly through the glass of his suit's visor. We were only allowed a moment with him during the hands-on, but that moment has certainly piqued my interest. There's a revenge story in here somewhere, and I'm looking forward to unravelling it. **NAG**

- Mikito707



Far Cry 4

Greetings from fabulous Kyrat!



RELEASE DATE / 18 November 2014

PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Montreal/Toronto

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

WEBSITE / www.far-cry.ubi.com

I hadn't been in the fictional Himalayan region of Kyrat for 10 seconds before I jumped off a mountain. It was all part of my cunning plan to infiltrate a militia encampment that was tucked away in some ancient ruins that nestled in the bosom of a particularly frosty peak two kilometres below me. Luckily I had a wingsuit, which meant that traversing the lofty expanse that lay beneath me was quick and (more importantly) exciting. As graceful as my leap

and glide through the air was, my landing was less so as I smacked into the side of the snowy ruins and found myself face-to-face with a particularly startled mountain yak. "Don't get too close to him!" level design director Matt West cautioned me as the yak proceeded to try and head-butt me off the mountainside. I scuttled away just in time, barely managing to subdue an itchy trigger-finger. That was probably for the best as the area was crawling with enemies, and

this was a mission with a decided emphasis on stealth. To the left of me, some ropes had been pegged into the side of a cliff face; a contextual prompt to use the new grappling hook and rope

"...soon I was trying to dodge cliff faces, rockets, helicopters and a mountain of falling snow."

❶ A subset of missions are set in Shangri-La – a mythical utopia in the Himalayan region. These legend-based missions are similar in style to the drug-induced insanity missions that were found in *Far Cry 3*, acting as a reprieve from the main game.



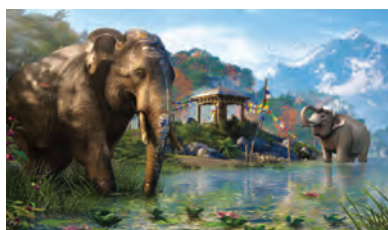
climbing mechanic. I reached the top of the cliff and began spotting and tagging enemies with protagonist Ajay's camera.

Two seconds later, a snow leopard came dangerously close to biting my throat out. Stealth went out the window as I emptied clips into the vicious kitty. With death kitten expunged from the mountain tops (and its skin taken for later crafting purposes) I proceeded to dodge the millions of bullets that were attempting to get close and personal with my cranium. My tussle with the snow leopard had alerted the camp, and now I had a gunfight on my hands.

"Open the weapon wheel and use the meat," West advised me. Of course, why hadn't I thought to use the meat? Meat, you see, is a new means of attracting blood-thirsty beasties to your location, and with the mood already heightened by lots of bullets whizzing through the air, inviting some fauna-based allies to the fray was probably a good idea. It worked beautifully. A bear arrived and proceeded to cause enough of a distraction for me to slip past the guards and throw a knife into the back of my target. I had to use a knife to "send a message".

All that was left was to photograph the corpse for proof and then make my hasty escape by flinging myself off another mountain. By that stage people were rather angry with me, and as I whizzed my way through the air (wingsuit!), rockets flew towards me and helicopters gave chase. With the rocket explosions came an avalanche, and soon I was trying to dodge cliff faces, more rockets, helicopters and a mountain of falling snow. It was all suitably high-octane, over-the-top stuff, which for a *Far Cry* game is pretty much all you need.

NAG
- Mikito707



❶ You play a different character in the Shangri-La missions, and you have a pet tiger that wears chains and armour. The tiger will attack targets and draw AI attention so you can dispatch your foes with a time-slowing bow and arrow.



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Assassin's Creed Rogue



RELEASE DATE / 13 November 2014

PLATFORM / 360 / PS3

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Sofia

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

WEBSITE / www.assassinscreed.ubi.com

Ubisoft's last-gen Assassin's Creed for 2014

Assassin's Creed Rogue is the last-generation title for 2014, and it continues the Kenway story arc that began in *Assassin's Creed III* and continued in *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*.

In *Rogue*, players take on the role of Assassin-turned-Templar Shay Patrick Cormac. Playing as a Templar has always been teased or just momentarily allowed, so it'll be interesting to see if an entire game as a Templar makes any difference. From what we saw and played, the fact that Shay is Templar doesn't mean all that much in

terms of immediate changes to gameplay. In fact, it's rather convenient that he used to be an Assassin, because that gives Ubisoft a plot-friendly means of explaining why this Templar knows all the gameplay tricks of an Assassin. Still, in terms of enemy encounters, things will be slightly different thanks to a new Stalker class of Assassin-trained enemies. These enemies will actively hide in haystacks and undergrowth, ready to pounce on you in much the same way that you have done to Templar targets in previous games. Luckily Shay has a sixth sense similar to Eagle Vision,

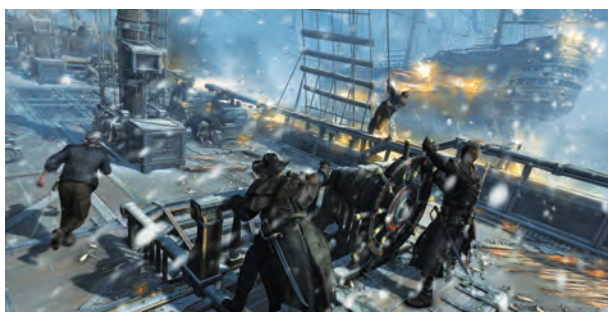
so with enough pre-emptive scouting you'll be able to circumvent being stabbed in the face by a hidden blade.

Shay has become something of an Assassin hunter for the Templars,

“...enemies will actively hide in haystacks and undergrowth, ready to pounce on you.”



● Your ship, *The Morrigan*, has two new weapons: the puckle gun (a machine gun that behaves similarly to *Black Flag*'s swivel gun) and oil barrels that can be used to trail oil on the surface that is then set alight – useful for damaging small pursuing vessels.



● Because the naval portions take place in the icy North Atlantic, there's no underwater exploration of wrecks. You have limited time if you happen to fall into the water. You will, however, find frozen ship wrecks to explore and loot.



and as such many of the fort raids and hideout take-over missions will culminate in you needing to locate and kill the leading Assassin. This gameplay sequence reminded us a little of the multiplayer modes of previous *Assassin's Creed* titles; you even get a radial directional ring around Shay's feet that points in the direction of your target. Of course, your Assassin target will very likely be capable of stealth and free-running, so getting the jump on him is ordinarily the better option.

Our hands-on time came in the form of free exploration in the sea-based portion of the game. This part of the game takes place in the freezing waters of the North Atlantic, so expect giant icebergs, blizzards and sheets of ice blocking portions of the map. Once you upgrade your ship with an icebreaking ram, you'll be able to plough your way through surface ice.

Ship combat remains the same as it is in *Black Flag*, however the enemy AI is now capable of boarding you as well, which means you might be forced (mid cannon-battle) to pull out a sword and protect your crew from boarding enemies.

All-in-all, *Assassin's Creed Rogue* feels like more *Black Flag*, just without the pirates and Caribbean setting. Ubisoft has eschewed a multiplayer mode, and with many assets making the jump from *Black Flag*, we're hopeful that this at least allowed the team to come up with an engrossing plot that's worthy of ending off the Kenway legacy. There are some memorable characters here that deserve a good send-off. **NAG**

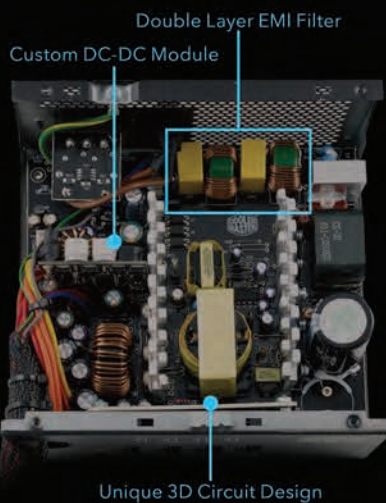
- Mikito707



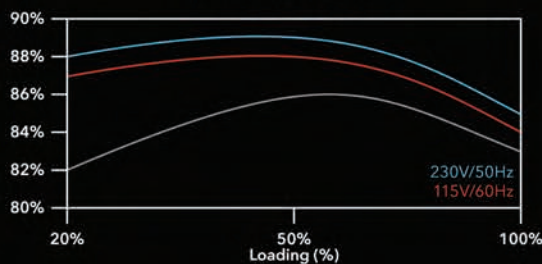
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RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORM / PS4

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Ready at Dawn

PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment

WEBSITE / www.playstation.com/games/the-order-1886-ps4

The Order: 1886

Gears of War meets Penny Dreadful

Developer Ready at Dawn is made up of a talented bunch of people. In the past, however, they've only ever dealt with other developers' IPs, creating the spin-off PSP game *Daxter* and the PSP versions of *God of War*. They were also responsible for the Wii port of Clover Studios' *Okami*. To date, Ready at Dawn has proven themselves highly capable developers, so it's exciting to see them finally taking a stab at their very own intellectual property.

Set in an alternate history London during the late 19th century, you play as Grayson, a member of The Order tasked to defend humanity against a half-breed threat in a war that's been raging for years. Because it's an alternate history London, Ready at Dawn has poetic licence with numerous historical figures of the time. Take Nikola Tesla for example: born in 1856, Tesla went on to become one of history's greatest inventors, but one whose work faded from the limelight shortly after his death in 1943. He worked for Thomas Edison but soon left on bad terms to focus on his own work. In *The Order: 1886*, after splitting from Edison, Ready at Dawn



tweaks history by making Tesla join The Order. While working for The Order, Tesla creates a number of the more fantasy-based weapons that will be at our disposal in the game. In that sense he's kind of like James Bond's Q, and we'll be visiting his lab to gain new weapons like the Crofton-Woolwich Repeating Compound Arbalest and the mini crossbow for when missions call for stealth.

During our presentation at Gamescom (conducted by studio co-founder Ru Weerasuriya) we got to watch protagonist Grayson exploring an abandoned hospital in Whitechapel. We were immediately

From the sounds of it, *The Order: 1886* is going to have quite the arsenal. Spanning real-world and fictional weapons, we'll have access to guns like the British M82 Carbine, the German Feederle C-81 maschinenpistole, and the American Ogden SA-5 shotgun.



“This is one of the best looking games we’ve seen in a very long time.”



At times, *The Order: 1886* is pretty creepy. Its apparent, liberal use of scripted sequences and cinematic camera angles gives the game a horror movie feel.

astounded by the level of detail in the environments. Ready at Dawn's art team have meticulously recreated this entire Whitechapel hospital, all the way down to the correctly positioned tiles on the walls of the corridors. Lighting is also incredible, with Grayson's dim, yellowy coloured lamp illuminating the environment in an amazingly realistic manner. Offices and wards are cluttered with objects that are fully governed by an impressive physics engine. This is one of the best looking games we've seen in a very long time.

Eventually this exploration led Grayson to cross paths with a lycanthrope. The confrontation was brutal, but also presented us with a potential caveat for this game: quick time events. We were surprised by how scripted the game appeared during this particular sequence and presentation. Gameplay moved seamlessly into in-engine cut-scenes, many of which included QTEs. Failing QTEs resulted in the lycan murdering Grayson (in some particularly gory ways) and having to reattempt the sequence. Ready at Dawn has always had a “filmic vision” for *The Order* and has deliberately chosen lens effects and letterbox aspect ratios to convey a motion picture tone, so the inclusion of scripted events and QTEs is probably par for the course. While it might turn some people off, it certainly isn't enough for us to ignore this game – it's looking fantastic and we can't wait to get our hands on it.

NAG
- Mikito707



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RELEASE DATE / 19 November 2014

PLATFORM / PS3 / PS4

GENRE / Platformer

DEVELOPER / Sumo Digital

PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment

WEBSITE / www.littlebigplanet.playstation.com

LittleBigPlanet 3



A deeper look at the game's upgraded Create mode

Gather around, creative types, because *LittleBigPlanet 3* is about to throw every Create tool conceivable right at your pretty faces. The three pillars of Play, Create and Share remain central to the *LittleBigPlanet* franchise, but developer Sumo Digital recently took the time to provide further details on the Create portion of upcoming *LittleBigPlanet 3*.

Creating amazing content in the *LittleBigPlanet* games can sometimes be tricky, but Sumo believes they've developed the most accessible version of the Create tools for *LittleBigPlanet 3*. The magnitude of tools at your disposal might seem intimidating considering there are now over 70 new Create tools. Some of those (29 to be exact) are enhanced tools that first made an appearance in *LittleBigPlanet 2*, and another 10 of them are reworked tools from *LittleBigPlanet* for PlayStation Vita.

Those familiar with *LittleBigPlanet* will know that the game's levels have always had three layers of depth to them. For *LittleBigPlanet 3* the number of level depths has been raised to 16. This provides a massive increase in three-dimensional properties to the levels of *LittleBigPlanet 3*, which in turn



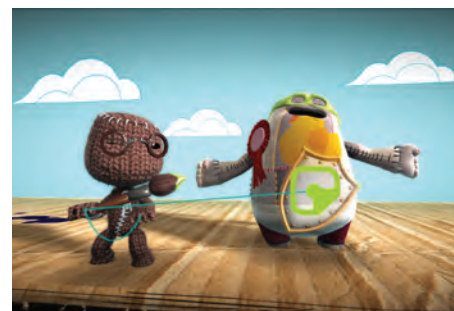
means increased potential for some clever level design. You'll be able to use the new Layer Launcher tool to fling Sackboy and pals between the various depths. You'll also be able to create slides that connect foreground and background portions of the play space.

A new Bendy Rail too allows you to create roller-coaster type rails across the 16 layer depths of your levels. The rails can be made invisible, which means you could make (for example) space ships that fly a pre-determined flight path.

LittleBigPlanet 3 sees the introduction of another three playable characters: Oddsock,



To date, the *LittleBigPlanet* creative community has logged more than 42 million hours spent designing levels. The community has produced nearly 9 million unique levels across different versions of the game. Every one of those 9 million levels will be playable on the PlayStation 4 version of *LittleBigPlanet 3*.



“...there are now over 70 new Create tools”



Swoop and Toggle. Each of these characters has a unique ability, but in Create mode you're free to make your own character traits for use in your custom levels. That means if you wanted to make a Sackboy who can fly and shoot fireballs from his butt, you'll be able to. If you'd rather provide temporary abilities, a new Power Up Creation Tool lets you do just that: utilise any object in the game and attach it to a Blaster Handle, and you'll be free to add a property to whatever it is you just invented. During our presentation we were shown a power-up called the Drill-o-nator that was quickly slapped together in Create mode in order to allow Sackboy to drill through some rocks.

Finally, Sumo has turned the PlayStation 4 controller's touchpad into a mini artist tablet, which means you can now hand-draw your own stickers to customise your levels.

While we're excited for more Sackboy adventures in *LittleBigPlanet 3*, we're even more excited to see what the Create community does with this new suite of development tools.

NAG
- Mikito707



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RELEASE DATE / 7 October 2014
 PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO
 GENRE / Survival horror
 DEVELOPER / The Creative Assembly
 PUBLISHER / SEGA
 WEBSITE / www.alienisolation.com

Alien: Isolation

All other priorities rescinded

There are 57 years between the events of *Alien* and *Aliens*. At the end of the first movie, Ellen Ripley gets into a stasis pod with Jonesy the cat. At the start of the sequel, both of them are rescued from the *Nostromo*, and returned to Earth. What happened during that time out in space, and why is Jonesy so much bigger now? In *Alien: Isolation*, we'll find out the answer to one of those questions (maybe). As for the other question, Jonesy was apparently played by four different cats so Weyland-Yutani can close that file, at least.

Strapping into the overalls of Amanda Ripley, you'll be shipping off to the Sevastopol – a decommissioned space station in orbit around the gas giant KG348 – ostensibly to look around for the *Nostromo*'s flight recorder but much more probably to play uninformed Codename-X Experiment Subject

#8 in another one of "The Company's" (un) controlled lab tests.

Putting both the "survival" and "horror" into "survival horror", the Xenomorph in *Alien: Isolation* can't be killed, and a single hit from it means game over, man, game over. Also, its AI learns from previous encounters with you (in reality, a series of increasingly complex behaviours that present over the course of the game), and if it notices something out of the ordinary – an opened locker, for example – it will look for the person responsible. There's also no on-screen HUD, and doing pretty much anything makes a noise. During my hands-on session at Gamescom, I lasted approximately one minute before dying. Both times. Part of that was because I was too busy looking at the motion tracker to pay attention to what was actually going on in front of me,

but I suppose that's the whole point. Somewhere nearby, perhaps, an inconspicuous looking man with a clipboard made a note about it.

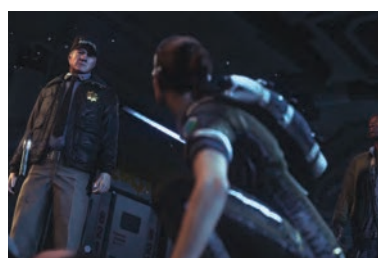
"Subject continues to demonstrate total incompetence. Recommend additional testing. LOL." **NAG**

- Azimuth

"During my hands-on session at Gamescom, I lasted approximately one minute before dying. Both times."



▶ In the DVD release of *Aliens*, a scene deleted from previous versions of the movie reveals that Ellen Ripley's daughter – Amanda Ripley – grew up and died during her hypersleep. Conveniently, the scene does not mention whether or not she visited any derelict space stations looking for Mommy, so everything that happens in *Alien: Isolation* totally happened.



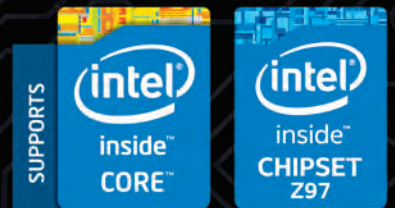
▶ The "Crew Expendable" DLC included with pre-order copies of the game features the original cast of *Alien* (with the exception of Ian Holm), who reunited to provide their voices, faces, and bad decisions about micro changes in air density.



BUILDING BETTER WORLDS

To maintain aesthetic consistency with Ridley Scott's *Alien* film, released in 1979, the game features the same contemporary lo-fi, retro-future design. Much like the *Nostromo*, the Sevastopol space station is fitted with bulky, monochromatic CRT monitors, analogue push-buttons, and a preponderance of important-looking dials and switches that are already obsolete in 2014, nevermind more than a hundred years from now. Recreating the VHS-style special effects, the team also recorded UI elements and game footage to tape, played them back on a cheap portable TV while using magnets and cable disconnections to distort the image, and then re-recorded all of that over a tape copy of the movie so that "if any bled through, it would be the film". It's the only way to be sure.

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LEGO Batman 3: Beyond Gotham

Holy fan service, Batman!

In the DC comic book series, Brainiac is an extra-terrestrial android (except when he isn't) boasting "12th-level intellect" and straight As in the fields of maths, engineering, physics, theoretical science, alien technology, with telekinetic and telepathic powers. Every comic book supervillain has a "thing", of course, and Brainiac's "thing" – when he isn't complaining on Reddit about how nice guys finish last, anyway – is using his

Hyper-Force Shrink-Ray and/or the Lantern Rings to cram cities and even whole planets into glass jars as part of the most inscrutable universe domination plan ever that totally has nothing whatsoever to do with compensating for anything. Or maybe he just really likes snowglobes.

Much more important to us at the moment, however, is that he's coming for Earth, and it's up to Batman and his superhero speed-dial contacts to save the world. To the Batsuit!

No, the *other* Batsuit. The one built for interstellar travel with the built-in, patent-pending Wayne Aerospace Body Fluid-O-Rang, Alfred. WE'RE GOING TO SPAAAAACE.

"...he's coming for Earth, and it's up to Batman and his superhero speed-dial contacts to save the world."



GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL

The line-up of playable characters in *LEGO Batman 3* spans the obvious and the obscure in what our host at the Gamescom developer presentation described as "a love letter to Batman fans" (presumably laminated for its own safety). Characters like Aquaman, Black Adam, Flash, General Zod, Cyborg, Nightwing, Shazam, Martian Manhunter, Wonder Woman, Doomsday, Sinestro, Mr. Freeze, Clayface, Jor-El, Scarecrow, Two-Face, Lex Luthor, Green Arrow, Deathstroke, Killer Croc, Batgirl, and Harley Quinn join frames with Beast Boy, Krypto, Blue Beetle, Black Manta, Stargirl, Mr. Mxyzptlk, and... Bat-Cow in a who's who of nerd quiz blanks. In total, more than 150 characters are featured in the game, more than any other LEGO game released previously.

RELEASE DATE / 14 November 2014

PLATFORMS / 360 / 3DS / PC / PS3 / PS4 / PSV / Wii U / XBO

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Traveller's Tales

PUBLISHER / Warner Bros. Interactive

WEBSITE / videogames.lego.com/en-us/lego-batman-3



1 *LEGO Batman 3* is the first LEGO game to include a season pass, spanning six DLC add-ons featuring additional characters and vehicles, plus extra levels and bonus achievements and trophies.



2 Without spoiling too much of the story, you can expect a lot of the characters to display... uncharacteristic behaviour. Joker suddenly can't say enough nice things about Batman, for example, and Flash has become a bit of a kleptomaniac.

With almost 20 games already launched in the LEGO series, you probably already know what you're getting with this one – loads of unlockable characters (including a mega-campy 1960s Batman voiced by – KAPOW! – the original mega-campy 1960s Batman Adam West, complete with proper "KAPOW!" icons because it wouldn't be the same without them), and a whole lot of building and busting things. New in *LEGO Batman 3*, though, is what the marketing blurbs are dubbing "zero-G gameplay", or basically retro-arcade sequences where you zip around in a spaceship, grabbing power-ups and blasting bad guys. You know, just like you did with your real LEGO when you were 10. Or 35. Or whatever. It's cool, I also have a LEGO X-Wing on my desk that I use to, um, express myself from time to time. We could start a club or something. **NAG**

- Azimuth



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RELEASE DATE / 3 October (PC / PS4 / XBO), 21 November (360/PS3)

One does not simply walk into Mordor

worked together with Sauron to forge the Rings of Power. Back then, of course, Sauron was just one of the Maiar, a sort of angel, who was only just becoming the corrupted mess of Baroque power fantasies he later (dis)embodied after discovering goth music and an interest in jewellery and politics (more or less). Celebrimbor himself was a Noldorin prince who was subsequently tortured and killed by his new bestie, but I'll leave it up to the game to tell the rest of that sorry story – in the meantime, cue the record scratch and sitcom jingle, Celebrimbor and Talion are now stuck together, for better or for worse, and not even death can part them because technically they're both already dead. But not exactly dead, either.



The broken sword Talion is carrying on the game's cover is not Narsil, the broken sword Aragorn carries in *The Lord of the Rings*, but rather, the remains of his son's sword, Achann. The resemblance is probably not *entirely* accidental.

Chronologically, the events of *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* take place between the end of *The Hobbit* and the start of *The Lord of the Rings*, around about the same time that Sauron is renovating his *Supervillain Monthly's* Top 10 Fortresses of the Second Age first place winner, Barad-dûr, and mustering his Orc armies to march on everywhere else. This is all totally unbeknownst, as they say in High Fantasylish, to the watchful Rangers of Gondor, who, apparently not quite so watchful as they should have been, are caught “completely unprepared” for any aggressive expansion policy from the east, as game designer Michael De Plater explained during a presentation at Gamescom. And so it happened that

"The ability to defy death, enemies, to bend their will to mate them," said De Plater. "In you are becoming a monster as the others in the Land of Shadow. Conquering their greatest fear."

"You are becoming a monster to the monsters in the Land of Shadow. You're becoming their greatest fear."



THE BLACK GATE OPENS

Because we already know that we won't be killing Sauron in *Shadow of Mordor* (that's a story for another time, boys and girls), his three Black Captains are the big bads of the game instead. Described by Monolith's designers as the "three aspects of Sauron", each one of the Black Captains represents some part of him, like an evil dating profile come to hideous life. Sort of.

First up, there's the Black Hand – Sauron's lying and deceitful side – who, being responsible for murdering Talion and his family, will likely be the primary antagonist in the game. Then there's The Hammer, who was once a man, but decided to pursue new career opportunities as an avatar of Sauron's merciless mastery on the battlefield. Finally, we've got The Tower, a gigantic Black Numenorean who currently holds the prestigious position of head torturer at Barad-dûr, and personifies Sauron's viciousness – possibly quite literally, because it looks like half his face was yanked off at some point.

• ՆՃԷ ԲԱՔԼՑՈՒ ՄԿԷԸ •



Déjà vu? The team at Monolith is consulting with Peter Jackson and Weta Workshop – the people behind *The Lord of the Rings* movies – to make sure that the setting, characters, and everything else work in the context of existing media, up to and including the Orcs' English accents.

• ԻՃԻԿ ԻԿ ԻՆ ԲԱՎԿԱՅՈՒ •

THE CHOICES OF MASTER TALION

During an encounter, Talion can choose to dominate an enemy rather than kill them – introducing some of the game's more... intriguing strategic options. A dominated Orc may, for example, be commanded to go on and get back to work as usual, but as your covert operative, Back in the Nemesis system then, the Orc will complete his own missions and even continue to be promoted up the ranks, and later murder another Orc on your orders. A dominated Orc can also threaten a Warchief, boosting his defences but also boosting the loot you'll get for killing him.

Talion can also dominate Caragors, the Warg-like beasts that roam around Mordor, and force them to fight for him or even ride them. Once mounted, a Caragor can knock enemies to the ground and savage them for an instant kill – a manoeuvre I discovered with something resembling ecstatic psychosis (or is that psychotic ecstasy?) during my hands-on session at Gamescom. The booth handler probably still wakes up screaming.

• ԻՃԻԿ ԲԱՎԿԱՅՈՒ ՆՄԻԿ •



There are three ranks in the Orc army – from the bottom up, it's Grunt, Captain, and Warchief – and, with a vengeful Wraith-man-thing on the loose, there are loads of opportunities for promotion. By killing Talion, for example, a Grunt can be promoted to Captain. Wait, what?

"Traditionally, death in a game means

that we wind back time, we reset it, we pretend it didn't happen and try again," De Pater told us. "But because you're a Wraith, when you die, time will move forward and the world will go on without you until you return."

Once promoted to Captain, an Orc is also assigned a series of special character traits, including strengths, weaknesses, weapon modifiers, and combat moves. These traits are randomly determined by the Nemesis system, and no two Orcs are quite the same. One Captain, for example, may be impervious to stealth attacks and wield a flaming sword, but also clumsy and terrified of wild Caragors. Another Captain will be totally different.

But no Orc will ever forget Talion while he still lives, and an Orc who feels especially humiliated by a defeat at Talion's hands might even get a bit personal about it later.



• ՆՃԻԿ ԻՆ ԻՐԱՎԱԶՈՒՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ •

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST

Shadow of Mordor features an entirely original story written for the game, but some faces already familiar from the books will turn up here and there. Although Monolith isn't revealing the full list of names just yet, we do know that Gollum is in it, and not just by some crazy coincidence.

"Gollum plays a really important role in our story, in some ways a similar role to that he's going to play with Sam and Frodo 80 years later, when they're travelling into Mordor," said De Pater. "Celebrimbor, like Frodo, has this epic burden – he's trying to resist the corruption of power and of the rings. And Talion, like Sam, is someone who's sucked into these events beyond his control and would far rather he'd avoided them altogether. Gollum plays off the tension between our two main characters."

• ԻՃԿ ԲԱՎԿԱԶՆ ԿՄԲԸ •

“[The Nemesis system] really lets you create these stories within the world,” De Pater added. “Every single enemy in the world can gain experience and level up, and become a boss. And they have memories. So every time they meet you, they’ll remember that and speak to it in future encounters. We’ve got thousands upon thousands upon thousands of voice lines for that.”

Captains can become bodyguards for Warchiefs, and a Captain who has been dominated by Talion can be used to divulge information about that Warchief's traits (and then used against him) and provoke a Warchief into open combat. In turn, vanquishing a Warchief can earn Talion a Rune that adds bonuses to his weapons. By exploiting a Warchief's specific vulnerabilities – attacking a Warchief with a weakness to stealth attacks with a stealth attack, for example – Talion is more likely to get a Rune that adds some sort of stealth bonus. Even in the midst of all this chaos, some order – or, at least, a predictable consistency – still remains.

And hope. As the old Gaffer said, "Where there is life, there is hope," and, you know, Talion isn't dead. Not *exactly*.

Interview with Monolith Productions



NAG: *Shadow of Mordor's* narrative is something completely separate to previous *The Lord of the Rings* games, which have mostly involved characters and conflicts already familiar from the books and films. How did it all come together?

Monolith: One of the things that really inspired us about both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is that they involve some shared characters like Gollum and Gandalf, but mostly they are standalone stories that work by themselves. It really doesn't matter what order you read them in as they are wonderful, and they both add to each other. We tried to follow that example and create a story that works by itself but which can be enjoyed as following on from *The Hobbit* and learning the fate of the Necromancer or as a precursor to *The Lord of the Rings* and showing more of the Dark Lord, the origins of the Rings of Power and the build up towards the War of the Ring.

NAG: Until now, Wraiths in *The Lord of the Rings* – and ghostly entities of any sort in most games, really – have almost exclusively been the bad guys. How do

you manage that kind of expectation with the introduction of a Wraith protagonist?

Monolith: Some of the inspirations were the Army of the Dead, who were bound by an ancient oath and ended up being the key to the victory over the armies of Mordor at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. And also the idea that the Nazgûl

themselves did not all start out as evil, but they became evil as they were corrupted by the power of the Nine Rings, which Celebrimbor himself helped to forge. So there are definitely two sides to Celebrimbor and Talion, like Frodo, Boromir, Saruman, and others they are battling against the corruption of power.

NAG: How much of the story content is canon, and how much is creative licence?

Monolith: The story takes place within the canon of Middle-earth and we worked very closely with Middle-earth Enterprises to ensure the authenticity of the lore, but the details of the story and some of the characters including Talion are original. The Middle-earth universe is such a rich world that it's very inspiring to be able to set an original story within it at the same

time as connecting it to *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the deeper history and lore of Middle-earth.

NAG: Despite featuring an original story, there must be some risk of putting off potential players who might not have read the books or seen the films.

How accessible is *Shadow of Mordor* to somebody like that?

Monolith: It was very important to us that *Shadow of Mordor* works as a standalone story with no prior reference required. If you've never seen the movies, if you've just seen *The Hobbit*, or if you've read all of the books taking place in Middle-earth, we want you to be able to enjoy *Shadow of Mordor*. Of course if you haven't read the books or seen the films and you enjoy *Shadow of Mordor*, we hope you'll pick them up because they are amazing.

NAG: In terms of development and design, the Nemesis system is so much more complicated than just an iterated hit-list of Orc thugs for the player to maim and murder. Can you tell us a bit more about how it actually works, behind the scenes?

Monolith: It's tricky to give a short answer because there's a lot going on under the hood to make it work, from AI to numerous systems tracking multiple interactions and events. I think what we're most pleased about is that all of this complication is invisible when players pick up the controller. A very consistent reaction of people who play has been that it just feels natural and intuitive and brings the world to life in a new and memorable way. **NAG**

- Azimuth



Reviews *Intro*

When life gives you lemons, you're supposed to make lemonade. But what if life gives you a pile of games journalists? Are we supposed to make gamesjournalade? How much sugar should we add in? Do we peel them first? Meet your reviewers...

Question / Invent an in-app purchase for an existing game. What does it do and how much does it cost?



DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES

StarCraft II, obviously. Worker units mine resources at a horribly slowed pace, and the only way to increase their mining speed is to buy Motivation Points. Each MP buys you an hour of "fast" mining. R10 per Motivation Point.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Risen 3: Titan Lords,
Luftrausers, *To the Moon*



DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI

The ability to turn *Candy Crush Saga* into a violent and profane open-world, sandbox survival JRPG-FPS hybrid with zombies, Nazis, Pokémon and Sims. Going for R200.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

A Game with a Kitty 7: Sky Crashers



GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS

Batteries for a flashlight in *Resident Evil* or any other horror game. They last 20 minutes and cost \$5 a pop.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

COD: Zombies, *Sims 4*, and *Destiny* as soon as deadline is over



MATT "SAND_STORM" FICK

A button that enforces age-restrictions in multiplayer games by releasing coyotes at the offender. Cost: \$1, so that it gets used often on those squeaky-voiced *****!

CURRENTLY PLAYING

The Witcher 2, *Hoard* and *Pokémon Pearl*

▶ **mini review**

Monument Valley (mobile)

Much like how Morpheus taught Neo to question his perceptions in *The Matrix*, so developers are constantly creating games that bestow upon players the same task. Perhaps one of the seminal examples is the charming, arty puzzle romp that is *Monument Valley*.

The game casts players in the role of a mysterious princess named Ida. It is her task to navigate through a series of rooms, buildings and landscapes where the geometry is inconsistent and vanishing points simply don't exist. To put it in blunt terms, it's what a game by M.C. Escher would have looked like; indeed, the use of double-imagery and overlapping shapes harken back to the artist's eye-catching paintings.

To complete each level, players must ensure that a clear path exists

between Ida and the exit; if not, her feet stay firmly planted in the ground. Making Ida move will entail moving and rotating the pathways, bypassing obstacles, keeping an eye out for strange crow-like beings and remaining mindful of optical illusions.

It's an engrossing title where taking in the sights is as interesting as solving the puzzles themselves. The only drawback is that everything is too easy and the game is over entirely too soon. Still, it's a short-yet-satisfying experience and another excellent showcase of games as a form of art. Get it! **NAG**

- Delano



90

A playable work of art whose style will totally suck you in, even though only briefly.

HEARD AT THE OFFICE...

“Shammalammaammoformygun!!” *

-Michael

* “Goodness, it appears that I have no more ammunition for my firearm.”



MICHAEL “RETTIDE” JAMES
My in-app purchase will make Geoff stop asking me to send this bit of text in this month because I can't think of anything. \$9.99.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Destiny



MIKLOS “MIKIT0707” SZECSEI
A button in *Diablo III* to buy more mouse clicks. Attacking is gated behind bundled packages of mouse clicks. Rift Guardians can sometimes drop click tokens. 99c for 10 clicks; R8.99 for 100 clicks; R1,000 for Legendary Gloves of Infinite Clicking.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Destiny



MIKTAR “MIKTAR” DRACON
A function to remove other players from your perception of the universe. Lets you select a single user of an online service, and never see their player character, profile, messages to or from, or about them, again. Cost: \$10 / R100.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Guild Wars 2, The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing II, Warframe, Marvel Heroes 2015, Destiny



NEO “SHOCKG” SIBEKO
An app that keeps reminding you how meaningless in-app purchases are using all kinds of different analogies. \$10

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Nothing at all.



TARRYN “AZIMUTH” VAN DER BYL
It's a console self-destruct app for *Destiny* because I'm on deadline and I have zero impulse control. It costs nothing because I love free stuff and I have zero impulse control.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Destiny. No, wait. I'm not playing games, Geoff, pinky swear.

▶ mini review

Spirits (mobile)

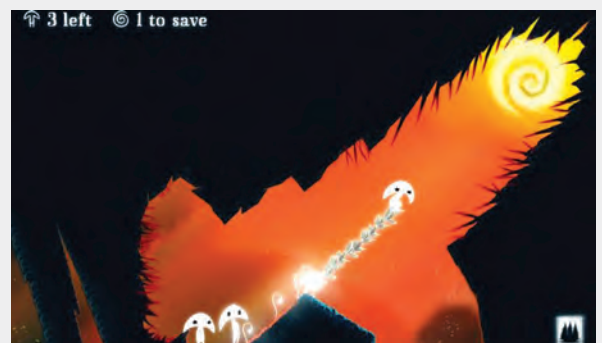
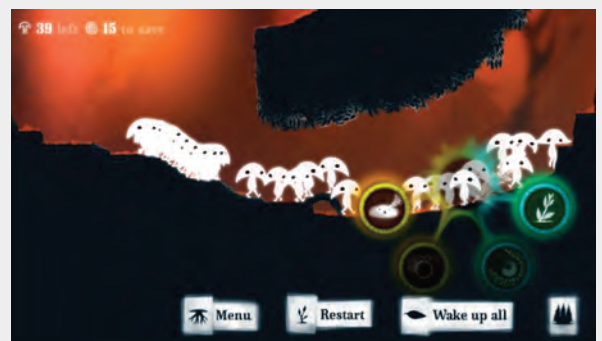
no point in beating around the bush: *Spirits* is, at its most fundamental, a *Lemmings* clone. The concept will be instantly recognisable to fans of the suicidal rodents; players guide a prerequisite number of creatures (in this case, spirits of autumn) over a short obstacle course, whilst imbuing any number of said creatures with special abilities that will aid their comrades in reaching the exit. For example, you may sacrifice a spirit to turn it into a gust of wind to blow others across a chasm. Figuring out which powers to employ and finding the most rewarding path to the level's end is the meat of the experience.

Though it may not be anything you've not heard of previously, *Spirits* is a soothing, accessible title that's as much a piece of art as

it is a game. The graphics invoke the feeling of illustrations that have come to life, complete with wiggly movements and an overall hand-drawn aesthetic. The colour schemes are extremely relaxing, with their assorted warm glows and bloom effects, whilst the simplistic ambient music complements the Zen-like visuals.

Despite some unpredictable physics, the whole affair is never frustrating. If you want a beautiful game that will relax you while it gets the brain juices flowing, you need to download it immediately (or at least try out the demo). **NAG**

- Delano



86

While not flawless, it's still a beautiful and artistic spiritual successor to *Lemmings*, pun intended.

PLATFORMS / 360 / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Bungie

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 12 players

PUBLISHER / Activision

WEBSITE / www.destinythegame.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom



Destiny

Guardians of the galaxy

We were out and about somewhere on Venus, and my buddy Julio asked if I'd already found the Golden Chest in that location. "It's just over here, on a ledge under us," he told me. I stepped to the edge of the cliff and looked over. "Where? I don't see it," I said.

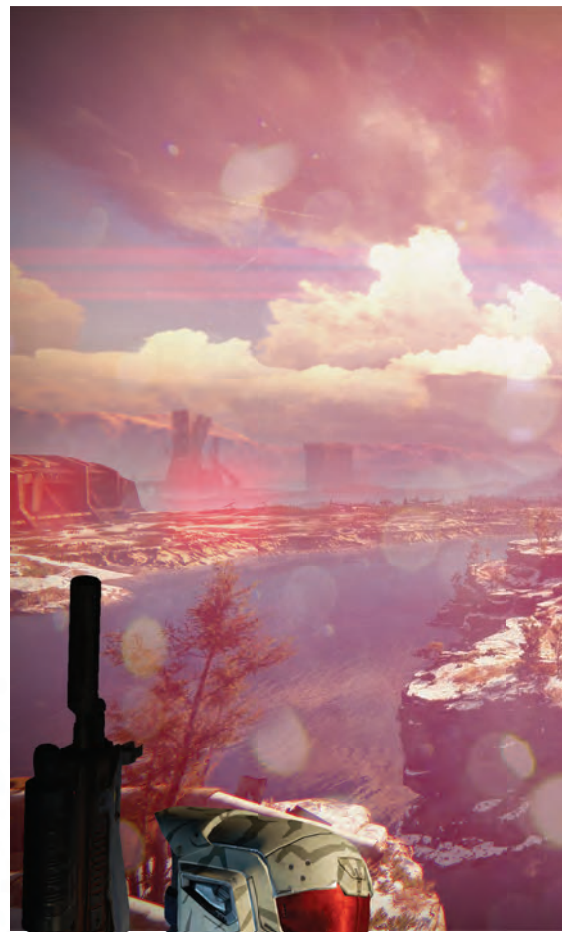
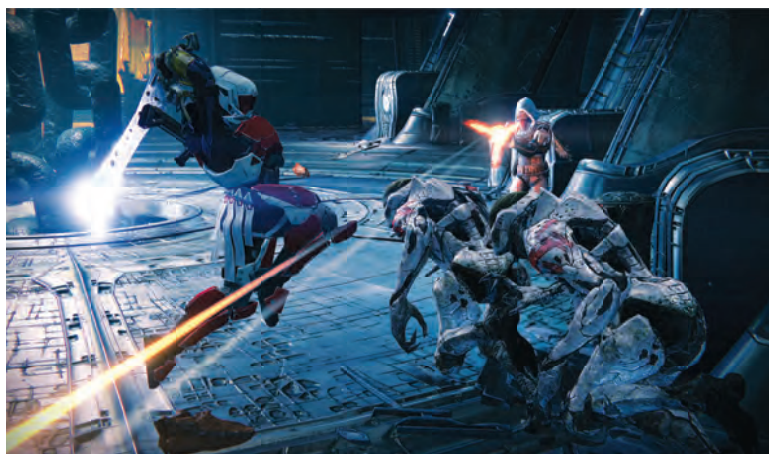
That's when he jumped onto his hoverbike and pushed me to my death. Classic Julio.

Destiny is a lot of things – some good, some not so good – but, ultimately, it's what you make of it. And more than this one thing or that other thing, I'm having loads of fun playing space cowboys with my friends. For me, that's probably the most important thing about a multiplayer game. For others, maybe not so much. This is one of those games that you'll love or hate depending entirely on what matters to you.

It also took me, like, two hours to write and delete and rewrite the previous paragraph,

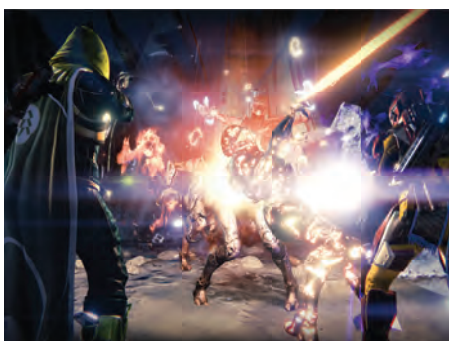
and it still reads like one of those vapid quotes you'd print in an inappropriately curly font over a black and white photo of a beach, erroneously attribute to some dead person, and post on Facebook. SO LET'S GET ON WITH IT.

Okay, the not so good things first. The story is an unmitigated disaster. It starts incoherently, ends abruptly, and I'm not sure I could explain what happened during the six hours or so in between. Something about... aliens. I'd expected something a bit more compelling than "... aliens" from the team that bought us the *Halo* series, although when I put it like that, I suppose the *Halo* series is basically "... aliens" too, but without all the ad-libbed techno-metaphysical burble substituted for a plot. It's a game where you shoot stuff for points, not an allegorical exposition of submaterialist deconstructivism (or whatever is going on here).





Don't eat the yellow snow!



REDTIDE'S OPINION

The hype machine behind *Destiny* was utterly convincing. Before opening the box I was expecting some kind of mythical blending of *Halo* and *Star Wars* and everything in-between. Living up to expectations like this is just impossible but *Destiny* has surprised by getting pretty damn close.

That said, the game has a fair shake of problems. The story and single player experience is ropey at best, you often don't know why you're fighting what and new concepts, aliens and lore are introduced assuming you're supposed to know what's going on and how it all fits together. It feels like the developers are setting up this great framework for all the future content, expansions and DLC but forgot to include enough in the initial release to make sense. I'm sure somewhere along the line it'll all fit together, but just not right now. This would ordinarily be a big negative but somehow the game's charming delivery of fighting bad guys, storytelling, setting and sheer technical awesomeness hide it very well – you just don't care because you're having such a good time.

The game world is beautiful to look at and interesting to play in. There's so much detail all over the place that it feels overwhelming – like you'll never get to see it all. Exotic plant life flourishes on Venus, Mars looks amazing and the moon is full of swarming aliens that keep you on your toes. The only let-down here is base camp: it's all a bit spread out and feels padded, you can't help thinking that a single location with all the vendors would have been better than this spreading out of characters that sell you weapons and armour. Having a ship is also a little pointless and really only serves as an elaborate loading screen to get between missions and in some cases to show your progress in the game. Again a minor quibble because when you do get to the fighting bits the game shines. Battling the very smart enemy feels satisfying and the blend of fantasy and science fiction works well. Sometimes you're fighting metal monsters and sometimes a handful of grunts that rush in and kill you. It's fresh and Bungie certainly knows how to put on a good fight, leaving the player feeling effective and powerful. *Destiny* currently provides a decent framework for a great future game; it's certainly worth the investment now because it's only going to get better. You also think

about it when you're not playing it, it calls out for more attention and that always a good thing.

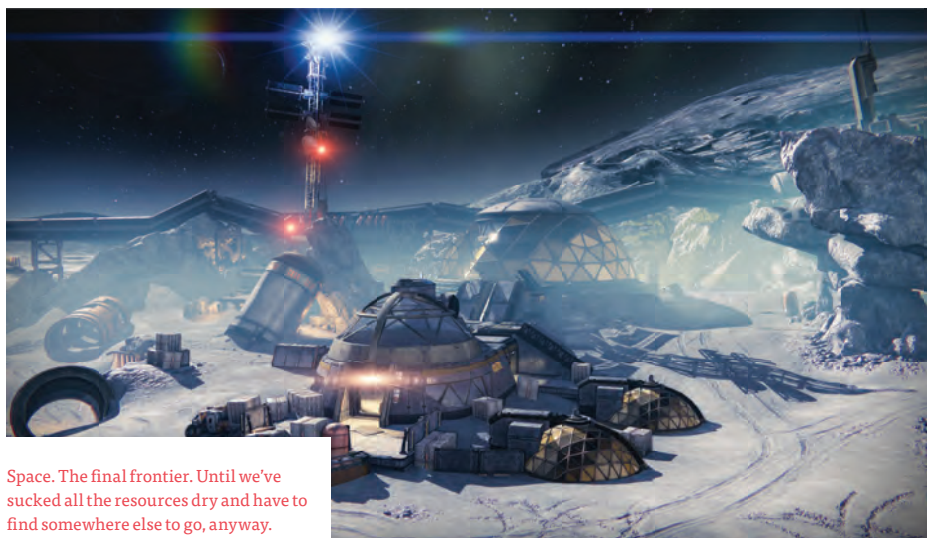
76

On a more practical level, limiting the co-op campaign and optional Strike missions to a maximum of three players in a Fireteam was, I think, an exceedingly questionable decision. I'm sure Bungie has some heuristic data backing it up, but for those of us who play games socially – and I'd argue that *Destiny* is, fundamentally, a social game – the option to add additional players to the party, and scale the game's difficulty to that instead simply makes more sense. At the time of writing this – just over a week since launch – the new six-player Raid mode has only just arrived, but the inexorable march of time and print deadlines means I won't have a chance to try it out before this review is due.

In fact, I get the impression that there's a whole lot of things I won't have a chance to try out before this review is due, but mostly because they're not even in the game yet. Although it's not quite an MMO (Bungie prefers the marketing blurb "shared world

shooter"), *Destiny* resembles one near enough that we should expect a substantial supply of updates and new content over the next months, and even years. For now, although there's plenty to see and do, the game world – perhaps "universe" is a better description – is so massive that it all feels a bit empty, like something is missing. Which hardly seems a justifiable criticism when I've already clocked over 20 hours exploring it, but it is what it is.

Now, the good things. The gameplay is absolutely outstanding. Not altogether surprisingly, *Destiny* plays a lot of *Halo* – the enemies, in particular, demonstrate comparatively devious AI – and even the most insignificant flashpoint firefight can quickly turn into a dramatic spectacle of consummate brutality, especially once you've unlocked the more exotic sub-classes. Once I'd swapped to the Hunter's Bladedancer sub-class, for example, I could use my charged-up Super Ability to unleash a series of devastating



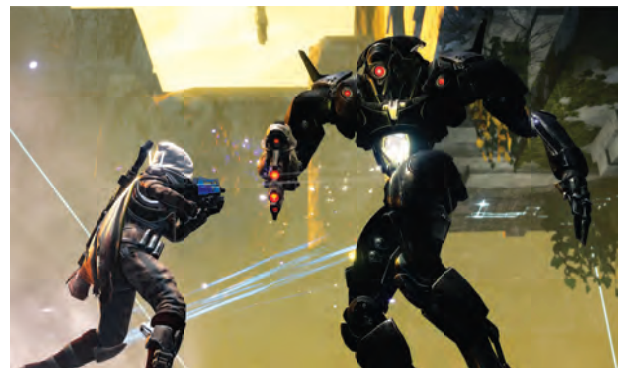
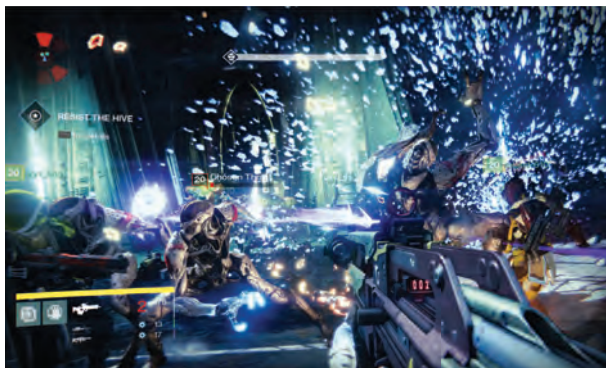
Space. The final frontier. Until we've sucked all the resources dry and have to find somewhere else to go, anyway.



MIKTAR'S OPINION

It's too damn early to review *Destiny*. Seriously, I'd be wary of any reviews that pass down a verdict from on high, calling in judgement, and making a statement about what *Destiny* is or is not. It's going to take time for the game to shake out. Like the launch of any MMO, there are people upset that *Destiny* is not what they thought it would be. There's a lot of weird misinformation and misrepresentation still clogging up the signal, which creates bad presumptions that can skew a person's experience. To top it all off, like any MMO, the entire game isn't there yet. At the time of writing, the first raid had yet to unlock, which represents a large chunk of what makes *Destiny* the weird quasi-MMO/FPS/RPG hybrid it's trying to be.

Ignoring all else, this much is true: Bungie can make a shooter that looks good, plays great and feels amazing to engage with. Your mileage with the story will vary, and there's insane amounts of lore for the lore junkies. When you team up with friends to take on Strikes (the game's version of dungeons), part of what *Destiny* truly is starts to reveal itself. This isn't a game you buy to finish in a day and then shelf. It's a hobby.



melee strikes that, even hours later, hasn't lost its thrill. Even in the middle of a mission, I'll still hop off my hoverbike and pick a fight with the random creeps just for the hell of it.

They'll pick fights with you too – sometimes, if you're in the right place at the right time, you'll get to take part in one of the game's public events. These are spontaneously spawned co-op missions that anybody in the area can join, and work together with other players and Fireteams to complete an objective before the timer ticks out for extra XP and loot. I've played in five or six of these, and they're super cool – it's not just one more thing to shoot, but also an opportunity to feel like you're legitimately part of something on a much grander scale. The same grander scale that's conspicuously (and inexplicably) undeveloped elsewhere in a game that sold itself on the promise to "become legend".

Where the story failed to deliver a meaningful reason to kill the bad guys, the Strike missions make up for it with overwhelming aggression. It's fight or die, and you'll probably die anyway. Each planet in *Destiny* includes at least one replayable Strike

mission (and a randomised playlist is unlocked at level 18, with multiple difficulty tiers for subsequent levels), featuring a structured sequence of objectives, and a big boss battle at the end. For my cash, this is the game's real prize – every Strike mission is deliriously chaotic, unrelentingly hard, and stupidly exciting. Here, you can dispense with any incomprehensible pretensions of saving the world, and just kill for killing's sake. **NAG**

- Azimuth

78 *Some of this, some of that, but not quite everything we might've expected. And yet, it's almost impossible to stop playing. Destiny was never going to live up to its extravagant hype, but it's close enough to matter.*

PLUS / Challenging gameplay / Amazing visuals / FUN

MINUS / Terrible story / Co-op player limit

PLATFORMS / PC

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Life simulation

DEVELOPER / EA Maxis / The Sims Studio

AGE RATING / 12

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

PUBLISHER / Electronic Arts

WEBSITE / www.thesims.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Prima Interactive

The Sims 4

One small step backwards for Simkind

The Sims is one of those series that's had the misfortune to fall into a predictable pattern: release a core game, fluff it up with expansion packs, build a massive community, and then tear it all down at start again. This is the fourth time we've seen this cycle begin and, just like every time it happens, there's widespread comparisons between where the previous title ended up and where the new one kicks off. But it's important to compare the core titles to keep things fair, only, when you do this, it only accentuates this new title's shortcomings.

To give you some perspective I'll quote a line from my 2009 review of *The Sims 3*: "...spend a few days with *The Sims 3* and you'll discover just how shallow those titles before it were." The same simply can't be said for *The Sims 4*. In fact, I'd argue that after a few days with this one, you'll be yearning for one or two of those fantastic features like neighbourhood customisation, Create-A-Style, and seamless lot transitions.

To make up for its missing features (the above-mentioned, as well as toddlers, swimming pools, terrain deformation, and a few others), the focus of gameplay in *The Sims 4* is slanted towards the individual Sims

themselves and slightly away from the idea that you're designing and playing in a living, dynamic and connected world. Maxis clearly wants the builders in the *SimCity* corner, and the gabbers here with *The Sims*.

IF YOU BUILD IT...

Let's look at some of the design tools on offer. For starters, there's some great stuff like rounded corner fences, foundations and counters, but not full-size walls. Building, adjusting and moving entire rooms is very easy, and neat features like optional off-grid placement and what is now well-matured support for eight-directional placement of structures and objects. Your Sims also won't get too horribly stuck should you use lots of diagonals.

The tools for placing decorations and furniture don't seem to have changed much, but they're fine as they are, although there's no way to change the appearance of an object once it's been placed down. Here the lack of Create-A-Style is sorely obvious, and the textures/colours on offer don't exactly scream originality. In general, the selection of items is just on the stingy side of acceptable.



Neighbourhood customisation, and really the whole neighbourhood concept as a whole, is one of the weakest parts of *The Sims 4*. You can change public and residential lots to your heart's content, as well as import new ones from the online gallery of user-made lots, but there's no way to change the structure, layout, or appearance of the neighbourhoods. You're stuck with just two of them, each with 21 lots of fixed sizes. And if you want your Sims to visit another lot, you need to sit through a loading screen every time – even if you're just popping next door. Considering that you can get nearly everything you need for your Sims in your home lot, there's little reason to ever leave the house.

THERE'S LIFE IN HERE SOMEWHERE

While the building and customisation tools are a bit of a let-down, the attention that's been given to the Sims themselves is very impressive. Sim behaviour is dominated by moods and emotions – a concept born in *Sims 3* and taken to the next level here. Angry, flirty, embarrassed, confident, energised, bored, tense, and more – they turn your Sims from little computer people into believable entities that need someone to take care of them, or use those emotions for interesting purposes. When your Sim is in a particular mood, new interactions open up with objects and other Sims which are hilarious at first, and





The Sim creation process features impressive face and body adjustment tools, allowing you to get in there and push/pull individual features of your Sims until they look perfectly hideous.



Rooms can be automatically built and populated by selecting from either premade options or those imported from the online gallery. These rooms can be adjusted afterwards and all of its furniture will fall into place (most of the time).

cunningly deep once you get the hang of the system. Taking an angry poop or confidentially bragging to your neighbours could earn your Sims Aspiration Points; get enough of these and you can buy one-shot boosts or permanent bonuses for your Sims. It's very possible to groom a Sim into an angry thug or perfectly-centred hippie, and actually use that to their advantage, which is great for players who like to go off the beaten path of the socially acceptable.

Skills and careers have also had a bit of an overhaul. While some career paths have been given the sack, their replacements are generally more interesting and well suit the quirky nature of *The Sims*. The skills that you gain in the quest to improve your Sims' job standing or simple usefulness around the house often unlock access to new and interesting activities, and they almost always find their way into conversations (like discussing recipes, video game strategies or home DIY tips with like-minded Sims). These conversations are also dynamic in that they can take place with ever-changing groups of Sims in many settings: at the bar, in front of the TV or while two Sims are engaging in different activities near one another. Multitasking, when it works, is a treat.

The Sims 4 isn't afraid to make it known that it's the Sims who are the stars of this show. Not the buildings, not the furniture or the design elements, not the

neighbourhoods or even the neighbours. This is about your Sims, their stories and their interactions with the world (immediately) around them. In that sense I commend *The Sims 4* for what it is, and I'm sure there will be many people out there who love it for just that, but I can't help shake the feeling that there should be more at the heart of this game. Especially considering the excellent starting points its predecessors have had. **NAG**

- GeometriX

74 *The Sims 4 is a slight but clear step backwards for the series. Some of the Sim-centric stuff is really neat, but it's all at the expense of a living, believable world. The result is a game that deliberately sells itself short now for the obvious grab at paid-for content down the line, and maybe even a few bits that can't be fixed with DLC.*

PLUS / Deep Sim interactions / Solid skills system / Extensive Sim creation process

MINUS / Lacking customisation options / Neighbourhoods are nearly useless / Limited object and clothing options

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Beat-'em-up

DEVELOPER / Keen Games

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 4 players

PUBLISHER / Deep Silver

WEBSITE / sacred-world.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Apex Interactive

Sacred 3

Not quite what it says on the tin

The *Sacred* series has always been the black sheep of the action RPG family. *Sacred* and *Sacred 2* were pretty generic as far as the genre goes, visibly lacking in the meticulous design ideals that underpin the likes of *Diablo* and *Titan Quest*. Despite its failings, *Sacred* gathered a substantial following, mostly thanks to its enormous game worlds full of quests to do and loot to pilfer, along with its wacky sense of humour and the inclusion of some unique ideas within its formula. Sadly, the games were also notorious for being completely broken. *Sacred 2* was such a hideously buggy mess at launch that it inevitably led to the shuttering of original developer Ascaron. Now we've got *Sacred 3*, under the banner of both a new developer and publisher. And it's broken in an entirely different way.

There's no sense in it even being called *Sacred*. Apart from the fact that it shares series lore, there's not much else tying this game to



The fixed camera is often obscured behind pieces of scenery, making it even more difficult to make out what's happening amidst the cluttered confusion of scuffles.



Loot is mostly limited to snatching up piles of gold, as well as orbs that increase your health and whatever the mana resource is called. Not exactly *Diablo*, is it?

its namesake. It's definitely not an action RPG; the bulk of the game involves fighting your way through self-contained levels made up of a series of tightly linear corridors, bashing at waves of enemies until you're allowed to continue to the next area. The core of what makes any action RPG worthy of hours of your time – a cunningly addictive loot system – is almost entirely non-existent, aside from the occasional canned weapon pickups, which you'll later discover are pretty much useless anyway because equipping your character with different weapons doesn't do much other than change his/her look.

Controlling your character is often painful. Using a combination of WASD movement controls, mouse buttons and number keys, you can unleash various combos, special attacks (called Combat Arts) and dodges while in combat. Your character generally does actions in the direction of your mouse cursor rather than the direction in which they're moving, which means you'll often fire off Combat Arts or attacks in entirely the wrong direction because there's a visual disconnect between where your mouse cursor is and which way you're actually facing. Once you get used to it, there's a modicum of fun to be had – but it's so woefully tedious that it's not long before you'll find yourself bored with the notion of continuing.

In between all of that is the endlessly sarcastic dialogue that constantly spews forth from various sources in the game. It's completely off-putting, with relentless

attempts at humour that almost entirely miss their mark – unless the mark is anywhere from mildly offensive to "maybe – maybe – I would've chuckled at that if I hadn't gotten tired of this rubbish several hours ago". The mission select menu that appears once you've endured yet another monotonous boss battle at the end of a level doubles as a character hub, letting you unlock new Combat Arts and buy various things with gold you've collected – but unlocks are hidden behind a layer of ill-explained obfuscation that makes upgrading your character seem like more of a chore than its worth. **NAG**

- Barkskin

58

Sacred 3 is not Sacred. It's taken almost all of the action RPG mechanics of its predecessors and traded them in for a mindless, soulless brawl-a-thon – and I would be okay with that, if the game was actually any good. Instead, it's a hollow, repetitive experience that's founded on half-baked game design. What a pity.

PLUS / Looks nice enough / Chaotic action is occasionally fun

MINUS / Ridiculous design decisions / Annoying, incessant dialogue / Controls suck

PLATFORMS / PS3 / PS4 / PSV

REVIEWED ON / PS4

AGE RATING / 3

GENRE / Art game

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

WEBSITE / www.hohokum.playstation.com

DEVELOPER / Honeyslug / Sony Santa Monica

DISTRIBUTOR / PSN

PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment

Hohokum

Wow, such colourful

hohokum is weird. But it's a good kind of weird, if "good kind of weird" is a phrase you don't mind hearing when it comes to video games. You control a snake-like creature as it zips and spirals and twirls its way around myriad 2D levels. The goal is to locate your fellow snake-like buddies by fulfilling the often charming requirements of each area. Each of the requirements and levels are all unique, but gameplay doesn't ever deviate from flying around the level bumping into specific things. I realise that sounds vague – it's actually a tricky game to describe. There's no explanation or tutorial, which kind of adds to the whole "art" theme that pervades Hohokum's everything.

Hohokum is brightly coloured with bold splashes of vivid hues offset by

stark white backgrounds. There were moments when I could have quite happily paused the game and just hung my TV on the wall like a piece of contemporary graphic design. It's a gorgeous "game". Throw in some sublime music tracks by various electronic artists (Tycho's stuff is particularly incredible and hasn't left my playlist in weeks) and you've got something that doesn't often happen in this industry.

At times the game can feel overly self-indulgent. Some might be put off by the total lack of instructions, and until you figure out where the hub world starts and portals lead, you might feel overwhelmed and a little bit lost. The sheer creativity in the worlds and characters is what will keep you moving forward. **NAG**

- Mikito707



We can't really overstate how beautiful this game is. Sure, the strong art style won't appeal to everyone, but there's no denying it's colourful. We always did feel that gaming needed to be more colourful.

78

If playable, digital art is something that piques your interests, then I recommend Hohokum. If you're into contemporary graphic art and deeply synthesized music that weaves and adapts as you play, then you need to be all over this game. If you're a fan of the more conventional gaming experience, then avoid. Otherwise, dive in and soak up all the colours.

PLUS / Mesmerisingly beautiful game / Incredibly chilled-out music / Nothing quite like it

MINUS / Can get repetitive / OCD nightmare

WHATEVER
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PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Role-playing game

DEVELOPER / Piranha Bytes

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

PUBLISHER / Deep Silver

WEBSITE / risen3.deepsilver.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Apex Interactive

Risen 3: Titan Lords

Keep digging. The treasure's got to be here somewhere.

Risen 2 was an impressively ambitious role-playing excursion, but one that proved too deeply flawed in too many ways for it to be easily recommended. *Risen 3: Titan Lords* shares its forebear's tendency towards punching well above its weight, but manages to string together a far more cohesive (but no less batty) adventure this time around. In it, you're once again the Nameless Hero, fumbling your way through a semi-coherent story involving crystal portals and Shadow Lords and half-dead protagonists and other assorted pirate-themed things. It's important to mention that, as with all of Piranha Bytes' RPGs, this is not a big-budget title, and from the outset it very clearly lacks the painstaking polish that goes into AAA games. But it's got heart, enough to make it compelling in spite of its more quirky character traits.

Anyone who's played the previous game will recognise many of the locations in its sequel, with a number of environments being reused and repurposed to keep them fresh.

There's a ton of space to explore, and early on you're handed control of a ship used for fast-travel between the different islands in *Risen 3*'s world. Each of those islands contains its own quest lines, characters and opportunities to earn yourself gold and gear. There's loads of distractions to keep yourself busy throughout your journey – although most of the game's quests are disappointingly of the “go here, fetch X, get Y reward”. Still, they encourage exploration, and there's almost always some useful treasure to be found if you go out of your way to find it.

There's a progression system in place that's similar to that of its predecessors. As you complete quests and defeat foes, you gain “Glory” – a resource that's exchanged to increase your proficiency in a variety of areas, like melee combat, conversational skills and lockpicking. Pump enough points into these attributes and you can visit trainers who'll teach you various abilities. Those abilities range from the option to gather crafting

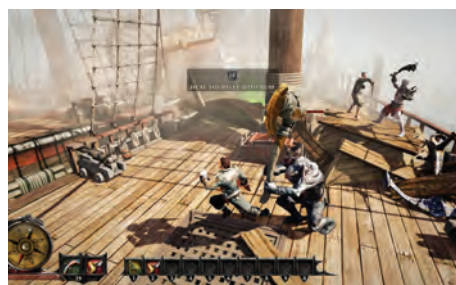
Enemy variety isn't quite as diverse as I'd like, but each island you visit does change things up a bit where hostile fauna is concerned.



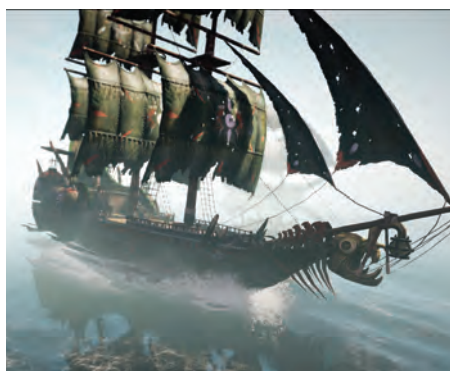
components from beasties you kill, to being able to train monkeys to steal for you. There's magic too, including some really peculiar stuff like a spell which transforms you into a parrot so you can reach otherwise unreachable places. Combat is still annoyingly clunky, with enemies always seeming to be just a fraction faster and more capable than you, but the presence of companion characters makes up for the difficulty this presents.

There's a sort of karma system in place whereby your character (who happens to not be alive, but not quite dead either) will gain and lose “Soul” depending on your actions. The game alludes to consequences surrounding this, but other than certain characters getting a bit upset with my chosen allegiance, I've yet to notice any real repercussions. Speaking of characters, despite the appearance of a few cringe-inducing stereotypes, many of the game's inhabitants manage to be quite endearing. **NAG**

- Barkskin



Yes, you can heal yourself with rum. Yes, this is (technically) something you can do in real life. No, we do not endorse it. OR DO WE?



72

Improving on *Risen 2* in many ways, *Risen 3* is an entertaining role-playing experience. It lacks the sort of polish that you'd find in big-budget RPGs like *Skyrim*, but it makes up for that with the sort of wild ambition that makes games like this endearing. If its rough exterior doesn't bother you, there's fun to be found here.

PLUS / Tons of stuff to do / Ambitiously bizarre / Solid RPG mechanics

MINUS / Buggy / Inner workings should be more transparent / Sloppy combat

PLATFORMS / PS3 / PSV	REVIEWED ON / PS3
AGE RATING / 12	GENRE / Action
MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 2 players	
WEBSITE / gundam-musou.jp	
DEVELOPER / Omega Force	PUBLISHER / Bandai Namco Games
DISTRIBUTOR / PSN	

Dynasty Warriors: Gundam Reborn

Angry boys with robot toys,
IN SPACE!

By the time a player finishes the six Official Timeline anime story modes in *Dynasty Warriors Gundam Reborn*, they will be a professional robot killer. While it's not clear what the "Reborn" part stands for, what is here cuts straight to the point: slice/shoot through an entire television series' worth of *Gundam* story – or mix and match in Ultimate mode – while wrecking tens of thousands of mobile suits.

Absolutely nothing is original, but it's put together with a lack of fluff that speaks to meat-and-potatoes gaming. Mobile suits enjoy crisp control with a good balance between melee combos and super attacks. On the downside, many pilots and suits are redundant – while other *Warriors* games have strived to eliminate clones, it seems that wasn't in the budget for *Reborn*. As well, battle objectives are sometimes confusing until you've played a map a couple of times. This may result in a mission fail when a critical NPC runs off to get themselves killed.

Even so the core gameplay loop is addictive with a ton of unlocks and much robot customisation to be had. While a fully satisfying amount of content is found in the base game, be advised that some of the most popular mobile suits in the *Gundam* meta-verse are found behind several DLC expansion mission packs.

NAG

-Miktar



Because robots explode, if you destroy any enemies that are flashing gold they'll blow up and chain-react, causing massive fratricide.

73 If you know nothing about the long-running robots-in-space series *Gundam*, this game acts as a quick primer by letting you play through abridged versions of the entire plot. Even for non-*Gundam* fans, there's a lot of well-designed content here at a budget price.

PLUS / Lots of content / Covers most of *Gundam* / Varied missions

MINUS / No English dub / Slightly bland visuals

PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC
GENRE / Action / sports	AGE RATING / 12
MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 players Online > 4 players	
WEBSITE / lethalleague.reptile-games.com	
DEVELOPER / Team Reptile	PUBLISHER / Team Reptile
DISTRIBUTOR / Steam	

Lethal League

The most intense
ballplay available

What a surprise! *Lethal League* knocks it out of the park, without even trying. The mechanics to this fighter are straightforward and very easy to understand. Two to four characters hit a baseball around an arena, trying to hit the other players with it. If a player hits the ball back, the speed of the ball increases. You can "bunt" the ball, temporarily knocking it straight up, but once it's hit again or touches the ground it will resume its previous velocity. If a player manages to hit the ball four times, they can do a special move that varies by character.

It sounds simplistic on paper, but the ball velocity gets so high that your only view of it is as a straight line bisecting the arena. Timing is critical, strategy vital, and seat-of-your-pants tactics (wild panic works too) all combine into a high-octane fight unlike anything I've seen before. In a very strange, oblique way, it reminds me of high-level play in Rockstar's *Table Tennis*. *Lethal League* has even replaced *Soul Calibur* as my favourite fighting game.

If you're curious about the game, you can play the original prototype of *Lethal League* here: lethalleague.reptile-games.com/prototype/ – it's not quite the same as the full game, but it's enough to give you a good impression.

NAG

-Ratkim



Each fighter has its own kind of special move, like hitting the ball through walls or making it travel in odd arcs.

85 You've never seen a fighting game like this (although it does bring back memories of the classic *Windjammers*). Part fighter, part sports game. It's crazy at high speed, yet remarkably tactical.

PLUS / Pumping music / Amazing combat / Great netcode

MINUS / Light on content

PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC
AGE RATING / 12	GENRE / Massively multiplayer / action
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > Yes	
WEBSITE / marvelheroes.com	
PUBLISHER / Gazillion Entertainment	DISTRIBUTOR / Steam
DEVELOPER / Gazillion Entertainment / Secret Identity Studios	

Marvel Heroes 2015

Feel like a superhero for free

With a huge roster of Marvel superheroes – and after some serious game-improving patches over the last year – this is a *Diablo*-like that fans of the genre wouldn't want to miss. You pick from a decent handful of starter heroes, like Punisher, Black Widow, Captain America, Colossus or Storm, then go about fighting through a nine-chapter campaign either by yourself or with friends. If you've ever played *Diablo*, *Torchlight* or other games in the genre, this is exactly like that except a bit more bombastic. Overpowered doesn't even begin to describe how it all feels, but it fits the topic well.

As you play, an in-game currency drops with regularity which can be used to unlock additional heroes. Or, if you're impatient, you can buy more heroes with real money. But I'd recommend just saving up the in-game currency for the hero you want, it doesn't take that long. Once you finish the campaign, you can replay it on increasing difficulty levels for better drops, or hit up a variety of end-game content types like horde-style missions. There's even high-level raids, but those require max-level characters and a firm understanding of how to play.

Before the "2015" patch, I was hesitant to recommend *Marvel Heroes* to anyone. But to Gazillion's credit, they've overhauled the game dramatically, and now it's a must-play in my book. **NAG**

-Miktario



It's impressive what the developer has managed to do with Unreal Engine 3, especially when the screen starts filling with superpowers.

83

If you love being insanely overpowered right from the start, *Marvel Heroes* has you covered. Playing as characters like Hulk, Deadpool, Rogue and others, it's amazing just how much impact the game lets you have even at low levels. While the combat might not feel as polished as *Diablo III* or as deep as *Path of Exile*, it does make you feel super.

PLUS / Ample content / Very fair F2P model / Potent heroes

MINUS / System intensive / Bit grindy

PLATFORMS / 3DS	REVIEWED ON / 3DS
GENRE / Tactical role-playing game	AGE RATING / 12
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None	
WEBSITE / www.projectxzone.eu	
DEVELOPER / Banpresto / Monolith Soft	PUBLISHER / Bandai Namco Games
DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom	

Project X Zone

An incomprehensible fanfiction brought to life

This is a sequel to *Namco X Capcom*, which was never released outside Japan. So the plot – already borderline insanity with characters from *Street Fighter*, *Mega Man*, *Sakura Wars*, *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken*, *Devil May Cry* and more all coming together – makes even less sense because we never got to see how it started.

Playing out across grid-based battlefields connected via plot exposition, you move teams of characters around and engage enemies. Once an actual fight starts, you chain together a limited amount of attacks, juggling the enemy and trying to land hits in a sweet spot for critical hits. If you're standing next to ally units, you can call them in mid-attack for even more damage.

The combat gets repetitive fast, and there's no real depth to anything you do, but the plot is cheesy enough to keep things interesting. It all looks great, from the battle animations to the hand-drawn cut-scenes when you pull off super attacks, but it never feels substantial. If you're totally a fan of all things Capcom and Namco, then *Project X Zone* is a decent diversion, provided you don't mind the turn-based nature of battles.

It might have served Bandai Namco better if they had ported and bundled the first game with this one, to give people context. **NAG**

-Melkert



Missions are turn-based, with units moving in a specific order based on their stats.

69

A strange mash-up of characters from almost every Namco and Capcom game ever made, *Project X Zone* is a so-so tactics game with very little depth, or meat on its bones. It's not a bad game, being well made with lots of impressive animation, it's just very, very specific in what it is.

PLUS / Humorous / Fan service

MINUS / Shallow / Fan service

PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC
AGE RATING / 12	GENRE / Action
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None	
WEBSITE / www.silverdollargames.com/ofdp.html	
DEVELOPER / Silver Dollar Games	PUBLISHER / Silver Dollar Games
DISTRIBUTOR / Steam	



One Finger Death Punch

Your two fingers have never felt more powerful

If you remember those flash-based animations from the Internet's yesteryears (like *XiaoXiao*), then *One Finger Death Punch* will look immediately familiar. You control a stick figure martial arts master, fighting an onslaught of enemies that appear from the sides of the screen. You only use two buttons, left and right mouse buttons, to attack enemies on the left and right of your character. It sounds simple, but *One Finger Death Punch* masterfully layers increasingly complex situations until eventually you either die like a punk or stand tall as a totally badass kung fu master.

With great visual feedback for each hit, a variety of weapons that you can turn against their wielders, and just straight-up solid-feeling gameplay, this is one of those little games you just can't put down. When in the middle of a fight, chaining together combos and not even seeing the colour-coded hints on which buttons to press, there's a great zen-like moment where you're just... rocking. The game might not look all that great from a distance (or even up close), and people might disregard it as cheap, but they'd be passing up something unique that practically anyone can play. Although the cartoon violence might not be suitable for really young kids. **NAG**

- Maklar



81

It's not much to look at, but *One Finger Death Punch* is a joy to play. It's fluid, responsive and jammed full of content. You can fire it up, fight a few rounds, then put it down until the urge hits again. Game acts as a good way to reboot your brain if you've got too much on your mind.

PLUS / Exciting / Lots of content / Cheap

MINUS / Looks cheap

PLATFORMS / PS3 / PS4 / PSV / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PS4
GENRE / Action	AGE RATING / 12
MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 2 players	
WEBSITE / www.gamecity.ne.jp/orochi2/ultimate	
DEVELOPER / Omega Force	PUBLISHER / Tecmo Koei
DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment	

Warriors Orochi 3 Ultimate

Be the man on a battlefield of many men

The most confusing thing about *Warriors Orochi 3 Ultimate* is at first wondering if you're supposed to know most of its 150 strong playable cast. Characters from Japanese and Chinese history freely intermingle as if they're old friends sharing a joke you're left out of. Then you realise it doesn't matter, there's only one plot here: collect as many warriors as you can, pump them full of experience, and go rip up the army of the great serpent, Orochi.

Here the game has it down. Pick any three unlocked characters for a real-time tag team, and travel through time (for real) to countless battle sites to tear apart thousands of demon possessed soldiers. Every victory grows your army and gains materials for crafting weapons and accessories. *WO3U* does an exceptional job of making the player feel like the hero of the battlefield.

Besides its lengthy campaign and free battle mode, *Ultimate* boasts the addition of the Gauntlet, an initially confusing fight through randomly generated dungeons with a five man team to grind rare materials. Less interesting is the anaemic Duel mode, which tries to make a one-on-one fighting game out of an engine which hates the very notion. Ignore it.

One bum game mode aside, it's hard not to say *Warriors Orochi* is the best there is at what it does. **NAG**

- Meektar



75

Combining the best elements from the *Dynasty Warriors* and *Samurai Warriors* series, this *Ultimate* edition smooths out any remaining wrinkles and adds in some guest characters. As far as games in this genre go, *Orochi 3* is top dog. At least until *Hyrule Warriors* comes out.

PLUS / So much content / Good campaign / Varied music

MINUS / Framerate wobbles / Punishing



HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

PC Upgrade RPG – a poor game! So I finally decided to upgrade my work PC. I also happened to have been playing *Skyrim* on the off chance that I had five minutes of breathing room between all the deadlines and obligations. Two years after this game came out, it dawned on me just how much of a massive fetch quest it is. I don't like it any less, but between this realisation and watching the huge *The Witcher 3* half hour video, my enthusiasm for the game subsided despite all twelve to fifteen mods I had added to the game including the DLC.

So the time had come for me to upgrade my ageing Z77 based machine. I mistakenly thought this would be a very quick process as the only components I needed from the older PC were my hard drives. Little did I know that needing anything from an older PC would turn into a series of side quests. All this was because I didn't want to install Windows again as this is my work machine. It has a profile that I use for games and it's not delicately put together or anything of the sort, but I can't afford the downtime. Installing all the software and getting up and ready again is always a 24-hour process, much longer than it takes to just build the PC.

Thus I figured, there are some differences in the systems in going from a Z77 to a Z97, but given that the platform technology did not change dramatically, this wouldn't be a problem. Well, I was wrong. Very wrong, because Windows would not recognize my USB mouse or keyboard, in fact it would not recognize any of my USB ports. Normally this would not be an issue as one could use a PS2 keyboard and mouse. I so happen to have a PS2 keyboard, but the real kicker here is that I don't have an optical drive. I haven't had one in over two years as I've not needed it since gaining access to fairly respectable VDSL speeds. So here I am; the drivers that I need for USB functionality are on a DVD. I can't go online because, guess what? The previous NIC was an Intel unit but a different one so my system does not have those drivers. The chosen motherboard (Z97 Gaming G1 Black Edition) does have two gigabit Ethernet ports, but the Killer E22XX chip it uses cannot use drivers that I had on one of my hard drives from earlier versions of this chip.

So what about tethering my phone to the system then going online that way? Nope this wouldn't work because I would need to do this via USB as well. Bluetooth could work but once again, I don't have the specific Bluetooth drivers as they are on a DVD. So something so simple was becoming ever more complex and this is when I realised that this is very much like playing most RPGs.

Nothing is ever simple. For example, you're tasked with the defeat of the "World Eater" or what have you (makes me wonder where this World Eater plans on living after devouring the entire planet), but this is not immediately possible no matter how bad-ass you are because you'll need this sword which can only be found in this cave. However, to gain access to said cave you need to find a map that has that location and the owner of that map is lost somewhere in the wild. The last person to see the map owner needs you to run an errand for them, which requires you to travel to a place in the game world you presently don't have access to. This is what was happening with this upgrade. In the end it would be a worthwhile upgrade but at the time, I found myself having an RPG experience unwillingly.

To cut a long story short, I found a way to get the drivers onto the system via one of the test platforms, which is probably analogous to using a save game editor or console commands. It worked and I finally had USB support and I could get on with completing my upgrade. I did think that I would be in a very difficult position had I not had access to another system, perhaps even forcing me to rebuild the old machine just to go online to retrieve the required drivers.

There's no real point to this tale, but if you're going to perform an upgrade without reloading your operating system take it from me and make sure you have all the required drivers on your hard drive (extracted if they are compressed). Keep a PS2 keyboard or mouse around and save yourself hours of frustration. Unlike a real RPG, no part of this exercise is fun. In essence, prepare for your upgrade, which is something I sadly didn't do and as a result I lost anywhere between six to twelve hours of my day. **NAG**

TAURUS:
All melee weapons
do quadruple damage
this month. But only
for one day.

➤ **PSU**

Corsair AX1500i PSU
R6,499 / www.corsair.com



➤ **GRAPHICS**

GIGABYTE GV-N78TGHZ-3GD
R10,999 / www.gigabyte.com



➤ **OS DRIVE**

OCZ Vector Vector 150
R2,808 / www.ocz.com



➤ **STORAGE DRIVE**

WD Black 4TB FZEX
R3,199 / www.wdc.com



➤ **CHASSIS**

Corsair Obsidian 900D
R4,299 / www.corsair.com



➤ **DISPLAY**

ASUS VG248QE
R5,999 / www.asus.com



➤ **KEYBOARD**

Razer BlackWidow Ultimate
R1,700 / www.razerzone.com



➤ **COOLER**

Cooler Master Nepton 280L
R1,499 / www.cooler-master.com



➤ **MOUSE**

GAMDIAS Zeus gaming mouse
R918 / www.gamdias.com



➤ **MOUSE MAT**

Razer Ironclad
R599 / www.razerzone.com



➤ **SOUND**

Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R3,499 / www.soundblaster.com



➤ **HEADPHONES**

Plantronics GameCom Commander
R4,569 / www.plantronics.com



INTEL

INTEL CORE I7 5960X
R13,299 / www.intel.com

MSI X99S XPOWER AC
R5,899 / www.msi.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE LPX DDR4 2,800MHZ 16GB KIT
R6,199 / www.corsair.com

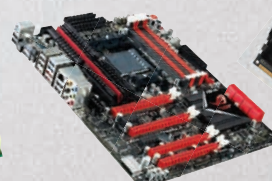


AMD

AMD FX 8350
R2,999 / www.amd.com

ASUS CROSSHAIR V FORMULA-Z
R3,999 / www.asus.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE PRO 2,666MHZ C11 16GB KIT
R4,999 / www.corsair.com



INTEL DREAM MACHINE

R71,984

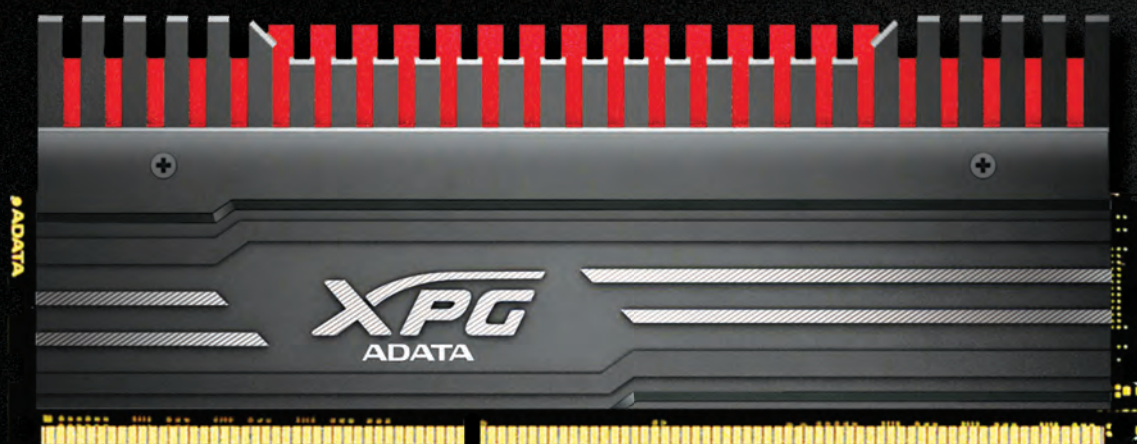
DREAM MACHINE



AMD DREAM MACHINE

R58,584

DDR4 is here and it couldn't have come at a better time, coinciding with the release of the first desktop 8-core CPU. In the next couple of years, all platforms will transition to this new memory standard, primarily because of power efficiency and performance. The differences for the desktop are fairly obvious with DDR4 officially starting where DDR3 stopped. If the previous memory standards are anything to go by, performance over the next decade will increase tremendously while capacities and power draw diminishes appropriately. It's important to note that DDR4, while sharing the same physical dimensions as DDR3, has a different notch, pin count and operating voltage, thus they are incompatible. DDR4 uses 288 pins and operates at 1.2V as opposed to DDR3's 240 pins and 1.5V operating voltage. DDR4 is currently supported on the Intel HEDT X-99 and Socket 2011-3 platform exclusively. In Q3 of 2015 however, the Z170/LGA 1151 performance platform will transition to DDR4 as well. AMD should follow suit with their new products in 2016. Below are some basic differences between the two memory types that should give you a more practical understanding of what this means for you and your computing devices.



DDR3

➤ CAPACITY

Consumer or desktop DDR3 modules are generally limited to 8GB per DIMM, so kits are usually anywhere between 2x1GB all the way to 8x8GB. Realistically that means the most amount of memory any one desktop system can have is 64GB. This is plenty of memory and even though memory requirements have increased substantially since the introduction of DDR3, it's tapered off, and at present there are many modern functional machines with 4GB of memory total. With that said, this may not be the case going forward and increasing memory capacity in a cost effective way has hit its limits. What DDR3 offers at present is still more than enough for gamers and the most demanding power users. At present the average memory capacity for gaming systems is 8GB, configured as 2x4GB DIMMs.

➤ PERFORMANCE

Hard to believe but DDR3 is seven years old, giving it a much longer lifespan than

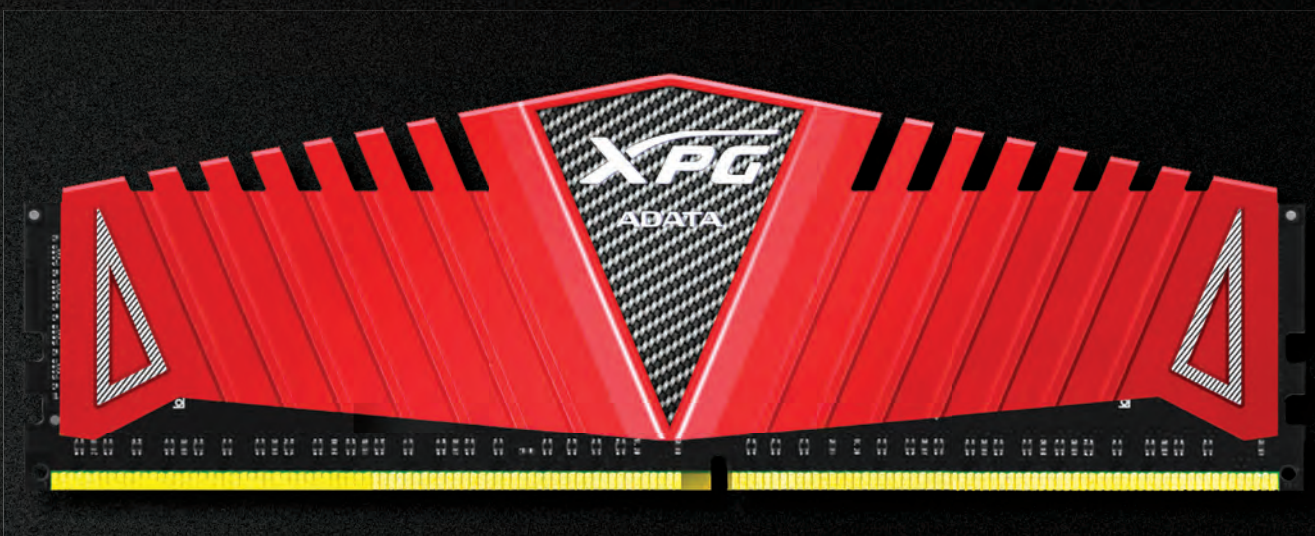
both DDR and DDR2 memory. It's gone from requiring 1.8V for the early 1GB sticks to the more commonly used 1.5V memory. Low voltage DDR3 (DDR3LV) has further decreased this to 1.35V allowing it to be used within TDP limited devices and platforms. Frequencies have also gone from a lowly 1,066MHz right up to 3,200MHz kits. These are rare and costly but they are on the market and can be purchased at most major retailers. Real world performance has improved with the refinement of memory controllers and improved caches and caching mechanisms within the various CPUs. Latency has increased in favour of frequencies, but modern day systems benefit more from the higher frequency and increased bandwidth. 2,666MHz seems to be the ideal frequency for most systems where there are just enough wait states to not compromise overall performance, but offer plenty of bandwidth as well. For interests sake bandwidth at this speed is anywhere between 21.3GB/s to a hair over

85GB/s in theory. Most systems will utilize around 70% of the available theoretical bandwidth. What's great about DDR3 is that its long life has allowed vendors to fine tune its performance to where it is offering very high efficiency thus keeping itself relevant far surpassing its intended life cycle.

➤ PRICE

DDR3 as with all new memory types began with high prices, but as always they decreased until they hit the bottom. In fact the prices were so low that it was detrimental to the industry, driving competitors away and threatening the livelihood of its participants. Prices began to rise again and with diminished competition, the industry has been recovering at a healthy rate. For the end user, DDR3 is costlier than it was at its lowest but still very affordable compared to DDR4. You can pick up a good gaming set of memory these days for around R2,000 with the equivalent DDR4 capacity retailing for the same, but for a single stick of memory.

VERSUS



DDR4

➊ CAPACITY

A huge selling point for DDR4 is that DRAM capacities per module can be as high as 16GB with some working, demo 32GB DIMMs scheduled for release in the near future. In theory, at least for the desktop and supporting platforms, this allows up to 128GB of system memory. What this change will likely do is grow the average system memory capacity from 8GB to 16GB, while simultaneously allowing single CPU servers greater capacities via UDIMMs.

➋ PERFORMANCE

DDR4 officially starts at 2133MHz which is the limit for DDR3 according to the JEDEC specification. Not that this means much because the vast majority of DDR4 modules on the market are 2400MHz or higher with some from G.Skill reaching 3,333MHz already. In DDR4's lifespan these frequencies will climb well above the 4,200MHz mark. Other than frequency and capacity, the major benefit

for DDR4 is its low power requirements compared to its predecessor. DIMMs usually operate at 1.2V with an unofficial DDR4 low voltage spec citing voltages as low as 1.05V. Lower heat output, operating voltage, power draw and higher frequencies mean DDR4 is better than DDR3 in all meaningful ways. It is also suitable for use in different devices from smart phones to servers, with only the form factor changing of course. As far as logic and implementation is concerned however, it is consistent across the various platforms.

At present the only existing desktop system memory controller allows anywhere between 50 to 70% of the theoretical bandwidth utilisation. This is system side however and is not related to how well DDR4 modules will perform on other systems. The only existing memory controller is in its first iteration and they will improve over time along with the DRAM frequencies, thus it is feasible

to reach the same efficiency levels in future as with DDR3 and possibly higher with systems delivering over 100GB/s in system bandwidth.

➌ PRICE

At present DDR4 pricing is comparatively high, especially for the high performance kits. The memory densities have not increased as vendors are mostly selling 4GB DIMMs with a few moving to 8GB. The vast majority of kits are 16GB and even at such capacities, you're looking at paying anything between R6,000 to R8,999 for 2,666MHz, compared to half that much for the equivalent frequency DDR3 kit. At the lower end with 2,133MHz, the prices are about the same for 4GB DIMMs which is promising even this early into the memory's life cycle. As more competitors enter the arena and ICs become more plentiful, prices will fall in line with DDR3 prices. **NAG**

AORUS X3 Plus

Website / www.aorus.com

ERP / R29,999

Supplier / AORUS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4860HQ
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 870M 4GB
MEMORY	16GB DDR3 1,600MHz
STORAGE	475GB SSD (RAID 0)
OPTICAL DRIVE	None
WEIGHT	1.9kg

The first AORUS product that we reviewed a few issues back, the X7, was a noteworthy offering but had a few issues (no Optimus support for instance). The X3 though, is precisely what we wanted to see. Despite that it is not as powerful as the X7 and is a different form factor, it is a more complete product.

Let's get our niggles out the way first though. The glass trackpad that AORUS has chosen for the X3 is without question the worst trackpad we've ever come across. It will not track if you slide from the left and right edges and it causes a build-up of friction between the surface and your finger like on the X7. Move the cursor around long enough or rapidly and your finger will get stuck. In essence it's unusable and this is made worse by that fact that AORUS will not ship a gaming mouse with the unit in all regions. Fortunately here in SA there will be a mouse with it, so should you decide you want this notebook, make sure you receive a mouse with your unit. For that we had to subtract two points, because it's analogous to admiring a beautiful painting then noticing it has a tear right in the middle of the canvas.

The rest however is impressive. This is one fine looking notebook that's compact, light and very well designed. It's aesthetically pleasing without going over the top and it makes a strong case for itself against Ultrabooks even though it's a fully-fledged gaming notebook. Powered by the GTX 870M, it handles all games splendidly on its 3200x1800 screen provided you play at 1080p. What makes the image even better is that the 13.9" screen packs the pixels very close to each other giving the impression of looking at a quasi-retina display (264ppi). The text is too small to read in some programs but for the most part, programs scale well and reading text won't strain your eyes.

The sound system is a little better than we expected given the small dimensions. It managed to be loud enough to use without the need for headphones, but obviously

BENCHMARK RESULTS

PC Mark 8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL accelerated): **4,212**

Battery time: **2h 37m 33s**

3DMark Fire Strike: **4,345**

Catzilla 1080p: **5,899**



sounds best with a set of cans plugged in. It won't give you the same auditory experience as that which you get on the competing notebooks with Sound Blaster Cinema implementation but it's acceptable for gaming sessions and movies.

We often talk of component balance and with the X3 Plus it's no different. The choice of CPU is puzzling because the 4860HQ is more expensive than the 4710HQ even though the 4710HQ has a 100MHz base frequency advantage, but a lower turbo frequency again by 100MHz. However, the 4860HQ offers Intel's Iris Pro 5200 IGP which is very competent but wasted here because of the discrete GTX 870M GPU. We do feel a better choice here could have been made which would at the very least reduce the price of the notebook.

Overall this is a solid offering from AORUS. It's not quite there yet as there are still some oversights for the asking price, which may be too much for some.

However, in concept we can't fault the X3. It still manages to impress more than the X7 which is a good notebook to begin with. If you're able to overlook some of the shortcomings this may be the most intriguing and most powerful 13.9" gaming notebook you can buy. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8 With all things considered AORUS has followed the X7 with a worthy X3 stable mate that isn't perfect, but does strike the right notes in the right places.

PLUS / Looks wonderful / Great specs / 3200x1800 display

MINUS / Atrocious trackpad / Software provided on optical media

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MSI GT72 Dominator

Website / www.msi.com

ERP / R39,999

Supplier / MSI

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4710HQ
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 880M 8GB
MEMORY	32GB DDR3 1,600MHz (dual channel)
STORAGE	4x 128GB SSD RAID / 1TB 7.2K RPM HDD
OPTICAL DRIVE	Blu-ray writer
WEIGHT	3.78kg

MSI has been working hard and fast to deliver a successor to the GT70 GeForce 880M powered notebook we reviewed previously. Usually one would expect that there's little to no need to upgrade or introduce a new high-end notebook SKU if it's still based on largely unchanged technology. In MSI's case however, the GT72 has changed enough in numerous ways that a new unit is justified and that's the one we spent a few weeks with.

High-end notebooks are always going to be a hard sell because their price range puts them in direct comparison with Apple notebooks in terms of presentation and quality, simultaneously pitting them against high-end desktop/enthusiast machines. Striking the right balance is something that no vendor has managed yet. The GT72 doesn't do this either, but it is a step in the right direction.

Built around the 47W Core i7 4710HQ CPU, it has four cores with eight logical threads at its disposal, 32GB of DDR3 1,600MHz memory and no fewer than four 128GB M.2 drives configured in RAID. This gives you a total of 475GB useable solid state drive space, backed by a 7200rpm 1TB disk. The combination of this hardware makes for the fastest notebook we've ever used. Be it reboots, cold boots, or whatever, there's simply no waiting. Programs open up instantly and if there's any delay it'll be because you're making use of the optical drive or waiting for software on the Internet. Short of that, the system is snappy and should remain so for years on end regardless of how much software you load on the system. That is barring the Norton Security package which has always been and continues to be an invasive piece of software.

More about software, the SteelSeries utility that is bundled with this notebook that allows customisation of the keyboard needs some serious work. MSI has a shortcut key on the left of the notebook that allows you to cycle through four different lighting

schemes. The only problem is none of those schemes include a simple on/off mode. That is, you cycle through a dual colour mode, breathing effect, an audio responsive mode and whatever else that has been cooked up. However, simply turning off the lights or having a basic single colour backlight is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the ability to change brightness levels isn't anywhere within the software but relies on a key combination on the opposite end of the keyboard.

It is perhaps this and the speakers where the GT72 has its biggest flaws. The drivers have been improved and you do have a much deeper bass and the audio in general is much richer. However, even at maximum volume it's relatively disappointing. It will not produce any distortion but in our opinion it's not loud enough. Other than this, the notebook is peerless when it comes to these kinds of machines. It feels lighter than the GT70, it is certainly designed to look better and the carry bag you receive with it is much improved. Again, powered by the 880M there's not a single game you can throw at the GT72 that will not run at

butter smooth frame rates. Technically we can't fault it. In the synthetic tests we did not achieve the claimed 1,600MB/s read speed, but that isn't important anyway as it was the 4K read and write performance that blew us away delivering the best numbers we've seen out of any storage solution. This is one seriously expensive but equally powerful notebook. It's not ever going to be described as lean or light, but powerful it most certainly is. The fastest gaming notebook just got faster. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko

BENCHMARK RESULTS

PC Mark 8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL accelerated): **4,699**
Battery time: **1h 5m 6s**
3DMark Fire Strike: **5,160**
Catzilla 1080p: **7,691**



9

Ultra high-end gaming notebook that's a worthy successor to the GT70.

PLUS / GTX 880M GPU / Marginally lighter than GT70 / Runs relatively quiet and cool

MINUS / SteelSeries keyboard software / Poor speaker system / Regular 1080p screen



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MSI X99S XPOWER AC

Website / www.msi.com

ERP / R5,899

Supplier / MSI

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X99
MEMORY	8x 288 pin DDR5
CPU SUPPORT	LGA 2011-3
EXPANSION	5x PCIe 16X
SIZE	E-ATX

Intel released nothing short of a kraken with the Core i7 5960X. Not only did we receive the first desktop 8-core CPU for the HEDT platform, but we got DDR4, a new socket and of course a new chipset. Usually a single change in either of these presents a massive challenge for vendors but having all that change at the same time is the equivalent of pulling the rug out from underneath them.

With X99, the opportunity came for MSI to hit the ground running with refined motherboards that not only deliver performance but bring in a host of new features previously unavailable to the HEDT platform. This is especially true for this chipset because X79 has aged and is very much out of tune with what's on offer with Z87 let alone Z97.

With that we now have boards such as the X99X XPOWER AC. Not only does it have a host of new features that bring it in line with what the Z97 XPOWER AC has, but it extends this further. Since this platform has plenty of PCI Express lanes, (barring the 5820K), there's no need for MSI to try and siphon off PCI Express bandwidth from elsewhere to support both M.2 and SATA Express. With 40 lanes of traffic made available, MSI has allowed their M.2 slot to allocate up to a blistering 32Gbps of traffic to it. The great thing about this is that you can do this while maintaining your dual GPU configuration at full 16X speed or perhaps even triple GPU configuration at 8X speeds. All these lanes would come from the CPU and not the PCH (platform controller hub), thus leaving the PCH to support SATA Express as well as the standard SATA 6Gbps ports amongst other things.

MSI has done exactly that and offered the most connectivity options in the history of their motherboards. That is a total of 12 USB ports at the rear of which only two are USB 2.0, dual gigabit Ethernet, seven SATA 6Gbps ports, a single SATA Express port and as mentioned before M.2 support.

Back again is the GPU ceasefire (turns off specific PCI-Express lanes), direct to

BIOS button, v-check points, LN2/slow mode, Bclk and CPU multiplier buttons and a whole lot more. For overclocking features, MSI has you covered and there's nothing preventing you from reaching world record speeds or claiming high scores with this motherboard. It is simply a matter of fine tuning and pushing your chosen components to their limits.

Of particular interest to note is that MSI, despite DDR4 being very new and vendors having to deal with how it behaves, has included several memory clocking profiles and some helpful descriptions within their UEFI on how each setting affects performance and stability. Not only that, but the tuning options that MSI has made available are second to none offering more than any other vendor at present. Navigating the UEFI is as smooth as it's always been and sifting through pages upon pages of options is an overclocker's dream which MSI has provided with the X99S XPOWER AC.

When we wrote this review, we were still on the first few iterations of the firmware, thus things were not as smooth as they would be on say the Z97 MPOWER, but

that will change as the firmware matures and more is learned about the platform. In the meantime there's no reason for you to not invest in this board. It even has the dedicated hardware controlled NIC and better than average audio solution. Given just how long this platform is going to be around, we would say that MSI definitely got off to a great start and finds itself ahead in many ways. This board is not ever going to be cheap but it is one of two motherboards that we would consider when looking at the very high end of X99 motherboards. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

7 MSI has produced yet another incredible overclocking motherboard that has the potential to be the quintessential X99 motherboard.

PLUS / Great looks / Plenty of features / Detailed UEFI

MINUS / Some consistency issues / Still needs some UEFI refinement





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Intel Core i7 5960X

► Website / www.intel.com

► ERP / R13,299

► Supplier / Intel

SPECS	CORE	22nm Haswell-E
	FREQUENCY	3,000MHz (3.5GHz Turbo)
	CACHE	22.5MB Total (20MB L3)
	TDP	140W
	PLATFORM	LGA 2011-3 (X99)

After an eternity, we have finally rid ourselves of the X79 platform. It was good while it lasted, but it had truly become long in the tooth. Add to which, for enthusiasts, it limited our options because short of ASUS motherboards, no other vendor managed to manufacture a competent motherboard in a meaningful time frame. EVGA did it eventually with the X79 Dark but that was literally just a few months ago, when you consider that the X79 is from 2011, in computing terms that's an eternity ago. Especially since its inception we had Ivy Bridge, Haswell and Devil's Canyon CPUs along with three chipsets.

If you weren't aware of this, Intel differentiates, or rather segments their desktop platform into three parts; Mainstream, Performance and Extreme. The Performance segments are by and large in sync with only variations in processor type. Sockets are identical and so is technology support for the most part (vPro etc.). For the Extreme or HEDT (High-End Desktop) segment there is virtually no compatibility with the rest. This segment actually shares its platform with the server/Xeon solutions thus its cadence is not in any way related to what we see with the other two. There are many reasons why this is so including the need for Intel to maximise its customer investments (Xeon platforms are many times more expensive). There's a need to eliminate as many errata issues as possible with any given technology, feature or process node as well.

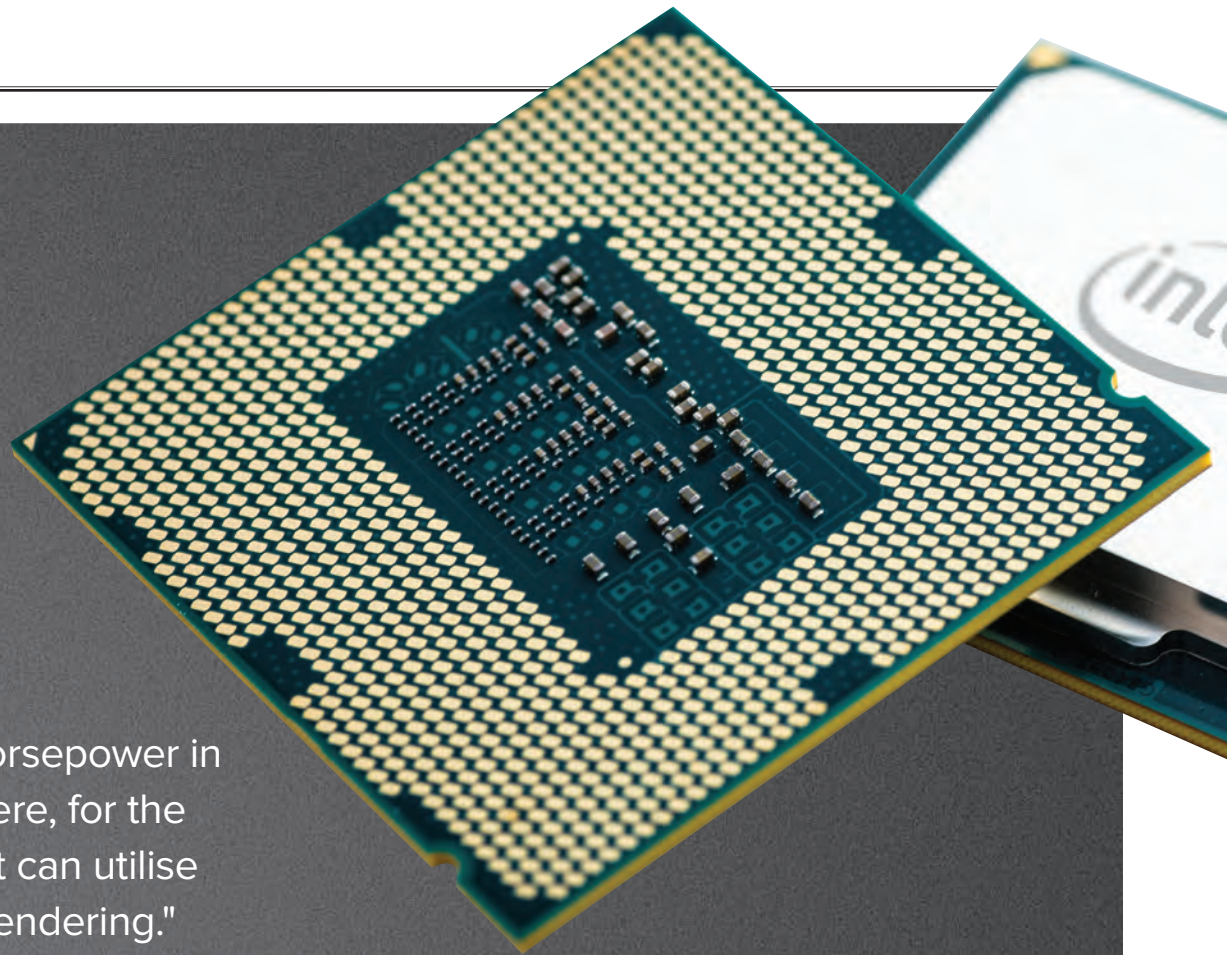
Given the numerous changes that had been introduced to the mainstream since 2011, with the X99 chipset and C610 PCH (X79 was C600) Intel once again brings the HEDT platform in line with their current offerings. There are few missing features, like Intel Smart Connect, and obviously no IGP but other than that it has a matching feature set. One advantage for the new C610 PCH is that it actually has more native SATA 6Gbps connections than on the C216 (Z97) PCH at 10 compared to six.



All this and significantly more go hand in hand with what the new CPU and platform as a whole offer. Even though the previous generation LGA 2011 CPUs were built around the 22nm node, the chipset was a 65nm part with a max TDP of 7.8W. Intel has reduced this to a 32nm part with a slightly lower 6.5W TDP. This is in contrast to all the CPUs being 140W parts compared to the previous 130W of the previous family.

That is all about the surrounding platform though, we here are specifically looking at the CPU and this is once again a leap forward in desktop computing. Believe it or not, Intel does not shy away from what this

CPU is intended for and explicitly puts it out there that it's for overclockers, enthusiasts/gamers and content creators. That doesn't mean you can't use it for all kinds of other number crunching, but it is something Intel is embracing, to the point where it's even in the press material. It should come as no surprise though because a good six to 12 months prior to the release of this CPU a very public Intel engineer asked on his Twitter account how many overclockers would be interested in an 8-core/16-thread part. Even with the small pool of competitive overclockers by comparison to gamers, the interest was obvious. Fast forward to the



"The sheer horsepower in the CPU is there, for the programs that can utilise it, like video rendering."

present and we have our first eight core part. We are not saying this is the reason Intel released this SKU. However it's worth mentioning that the current 5930K could have easily remained at the helm, as the premier and fastest desktop CPU money could buy. Instead we have the current 5960X with an unprecedented number of threads.

Amongst the numerous changes, we also have a new memory type to contend with. This will be covered in future DDR4 memory reviews, but briefly stated, even in these early days we've seen some sizeable performance gains in bandwidth. The latency may be higher than before, but the consistently higher frequencies negate the longer wait states and we have even better DRAM frequency utilization, in addition to a lower TDP for the memory. That does mean that memory prices are slightly unfriendly, but this is only because we have grown accustomed to the dirt cheap DDR3 prices which actually jeopardized the DRAM market in the long run, eliminating competitors, ultimately limiting consumer choice. DDR4 has some room to grow in both performance and lower prices but right now it is an investment that you have to make to get on the X99 platform.

What you do get should you decide to buy into this CPU is unparalleled performance in just about every program

you can imagine. Logic would dictate that the 5960X at a nominal frequency of 3GHz (3.5GHz Turbo) should be slower than the 4790K and the 4960X, however this isn't so. Be it the gigantic L3 cache, or the blisteringly fast L1 and L2 (or perhaps a combination), the 5960X manages to match both these CPUs even with the massive frequency disadvantage. This is easy to see when you overclock the CPU. At a moderate 4GHz, it outpaces the other CPUs at 4.6GHz in just about every test as well. You'll not magically get higher in game frame rates, those are entirely about your GPU, but should you employ two high-end GPUs or more you'll notice this. To look at it from that point of view though is missing the point of the 5960X. It's only when you load real multi-threaded workloads where the CPU shines. To put that into perspective, a single 4790K cooled with liquid nitrogen at a blistering 6.2GHz with all eight threads made available (few samples can achieve this) is slower in Cinebench, XTU and wPrime than a 5960X operating at 4.5GHz. Perhaps an unfair comparison, well how about a 4960X with all its 12 threads available at 5.6GHz coming up short against a 5960X at a standard 3.5GHz. To champion this point home, some 3DMark records were broken with the CPU using air cooling that were previously set by the 4960X that was cooled via liquid nitrogen.

The sheer horsepower in the CPU is there, for the programs that can utilise it, like video rendering. You may be able to encode video using your GPU, but just working with raw footage is something that you can't accelerate in that manner which the 5960X handles very well. The difference in performance is only made more apparent when you deal with 4K content which is just staggering in its bandwidth and space requirements. This is the new king of the hill; it's not an incremental change, but it's a new landscape where the immense amount of compute power made available on the desktop rivals that of seriously expensive work stations of three or four years ago.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko

10

We've nothing to dislike about this CPU, it is as good as it gets with current manufacturing technology.

PLUS / 16 threads / Incredible performance
DDR4 controller

MINUS / Needs new memory and motherboard

CM Storm Novatouch TKL

Website / www.coolermaster.com

ERP / TBA Supplier / Cooler Master

Cooler Master has returned with another short/numpad-less gaming keyboard. If you need your numpad then read no further as this keyboard is not for you. Should it be of no value to you, this just may be the keyboard you've always wanted.

The big draw with this one over the Rapid-I is that Cooler Master is using their own custom switches and rubber dome housing to reduce the noise produced when two plastic parts collide. This housing (or base) obviously alters how the keys feel but oddly enough it's for the better. Not only does this reduce noise but it makes for a softer touch that still caters to gamers but would work very well for those who just use it for typing exclusively. Cooler Master has not tossed Cherry MX key compatibility out the window with the TKL. You may still use your standard caps and replace the ones that ship with this keyboard. Cooler Master provides a set of tongs for this in the package.

In the days where gaming peripheral vendors are trying to cram as much as they can onto their keyboards, Cooler Master is going the opposite direction with no dedicated media keys, but simple function key shortcuts. A minimalist design will not appeal to everybody but it must be said that this keyboard does look decisively dull. It's a thick rectangle with not an angle or curve to be found. It works well enough at its primary purpose but it can be even better with a little bit of time invested in the aesthetics. For what it is though, it does a good job and fans of this kind of keyboard should find it very appealing. For the rest of the gaming population this may be just a tad too barren to warrant a switch from the tried and trusted keyboards with macro and media keys let alone USB hubs.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko



7

The Novatouch TKL is a more refined version of the Rapid-I. The new key switches feel great and they should find fans in just about every market.

PLUS / Reduced clicking noise / Great build quality / Compatible with Cherry MX key caps

MINUS / Basic layout / Some people do actually use the keypad / Looks bland

Corsair Vengeance LPX DDR4 2,800MHz 16GB Kit

Website / www.corsair.com

ERP / R5,799 Supplier / Rectron

SPECS	FREQUENCY	2,800MHz
	TIMINGS	16-18-18-36 (XMP 2.0)
	VOLTAGE	1.2V

What's important to know about this kit is that it's a 288-pin DDR4 set. So only look to it if you are on the X99 platform and seeking compatible high performance DRAM.

Unlike the previous Vengeance series, the LPX is a low profile 1.2V kit that is rated at 2.8GHz. The timings are higher than what you'd see with DDR3, but don't be fooled by that. The operating voltage is very low and the kit does not heat up at all during operation. The performance is plentiful provided you have configured your system properly. XMP does help with this (of which there are two profiles) as the X99 CPU is very sensitive to the Uncore frequency. Be advised that this clock has a great deal to do with how much performance you can extract from any set of memory.

Assuming you're well versed with the intricacies of X99 system tuning you'll find that the LPX delivers in both performance and overclocking headroom. In our limited testing we were not only able to run the pre-configured 3,000MHz XMP profile (it switches to 1.35V) but with further tuning we pushed to 3,000MHz 15-15-15-36 1T which matches the performance of kits costing nearly twice as much. With motherboards improving at a rapid pace we've no doubt that you'll be able to extract even more from this set in future. As it is, this is still one very expensive but great performing kit with the potential to go even further. Unlike previous Corsair kits, you're not going to get a memory cooler here. This is understandable for two reasons which are primarily because the DRAM just doesn't get hot at all, sometimes not even warm. Second is that for the X99 motherboards, the DIMMS are on opposite sides of the motherboard much like it was with X79, thus you'd need two DRAM coolers for a single kit which would further drive prices up.

For its sheer performance and overclocking/tuning headroom, we are adding this kit to our Intel Dream Machine Rig.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko



7

The Corsair LPX set is sold as 2,800, but in truth will reach much higher speeds with even better timings. It's undersold but certainly over delivers.

PLUS / Has 3,000MHz XMP profile / Great overclocking headroom

MINUS / Like all DDR4, it's expensive / Availability

Plextor M6e 256GB PCIe SSD

Website / www.goplextor.com

ERP / R3,799 Supplier / Plextor

SPECS	CONTROLLER	Marvell 88SS9183
	NAND TYPE	19nm Toshiba Toggle Advanced
	CACHE	N/A
	FORM FACTOR	PCI Express X4
	INTERFACE	PCI Express

The Plextor M6e is a PCI Express solution but it's actually an M.2 drive mounted on a PCI Express card. There's nothing preventing you from installing this directly onto a supporting motherboard, but you'll not want to do that for two reasons. Firstly it will void your warranty, and secondly you'll lose out on performance. This is unless you use any Z97 or later ASRock motherboard which wires twice the lanes to their M.2 socket allowing up to PCI Express X4 speeds, which happens to be the link speed of the card anyway.

With full support for AHCI, the M6e will allow you to boot from it and use it as a regular drive on your system. The firmware is loaded even before your UEFI, thus it will show up in your UEFI/BIOS as a bootable device.

So why then would you want this drive? It's a simple matter of speed. Right now you'll not find a much faster SATA 6Gbps drive than this one. Even the mighty impressive OCZ Vertex 150/180, Intel's 700 series and Samsung's EVO drives will not match the M6e where it counts. If you look at the benchmarks you'll see that the queue-depth numbers are good, however we've recorded higher from regular SATA drives. Do not be put off however as these numbers are not as important as they once were. Simply put, compared to the fastest SAS 15K mechanical drives, the M6e is still several orders of magnitude faster.

The write speed on the M6e is superb but what really shows the advantage of perhaps the PCI Express interface is the very low maximum IO response time which we recorded at 7.2ms. It's also worth noting that throughout the drive from the first block to the last, the throughput uniform, even after we filled the drive with junk data, then deleted it to trigger the TRIM command, the M6e

showed remarkable performance. Ultimately this is for the power users and gamers with deep pockets and avid desire for speed. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko



8

This may not be the fastest drive we've ever tested, but it is right up there in performance and the price is really low for this kind of performance.

PLUS / Very good performance / Five year warranty

MINUS / Nothing

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www.safact.co.za

Delux T20 gaming keyboard

- Website / www.crownhyperworld.co.za
- ERP / R399 Supplier / Crown Hyper World

SPECS	WINDOWS KEY LOCK	Yes
	ANTI-GHOSTING	Up to ten simultaneous key presses
	INPUTS	2x USB 2.0 / SD, T-Flash card reader
	MACRO KEYS	10 (eight extra on expansion slot)

This gaming keyboard costs R399, and yet it touts many of the features that are available on keyboards that cost three or four times as much. Those words should make you sit up and take notice if you're looking to buy a gaming keyboard, but are on a very, very tight budget.

Even without knowing the retail price beforehand, it's immediately apparent upon removing the Delux T20 from its packaging that it lacks the high-end quality promised by more recognisable peripheral brands. The materials used aren't quite as impressive, with cheap-feeling plastics and an ever-so-slightly crude aesthetic permeating its design. Aside from its lack of ostentatious flair, however, there's not much wrong with the T20's build.

There's no backlighting for the keys (although the built-in volume dial does light up blue), but the most important gaming-related keys are coloured red to make them easier to spot. Five macro keys line the left side of the board, split between two memory banks – and in the box you'll find a USB-powered companion board containing eight more macro keys, should you need them. There are no dedicated media controls, aside from the volume dial. Typing on the T20 is comfortable, but the long travel distance of the keys is something you may need to acclimatise to.

There's a plastic flap on the right-hand side of the keyboard, concealing a USB 2.0 port (there's also another one of these at the keyboard's top-right) and SD/T-Flash card readers, which are useful features to have. Ultimately, it's tough to find anything to complain about with the Delux T20, because at just under R400, we can't imagine there's a cheaper gaming keyboard out there.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



7

For the price, this is a great keyboard – but its overall quality obviously can't match its high-end rivals.

PLUS / Super cheap / Solid features

MINUS / Feels as cheap as it is / Lack of media controls

Mionix Avior 7000 and Sargas 400

- Website / www.dcstore.co.za
- ERP / R849 (mouse) R269 (mouse mat)
- Supplier / DC Store

SPECS	SENSOR	7,000dpi optical
	BUTTONS	9 (programmable)
	MEMORY	128KB
	POLLING RATE	1,000Hz

Most gaming mice try so very hard to be so very good at a particular thing, but the Avior on review here seems to go out of its way to be the best at everything, to everyone. It certainly makes a good effort at it.

It's not often that an ambidextrous mouse is this comfortable. Sure, those over-hanging wings on the sides are a little bulky and might not suit every variation of grip style, but in general the Avior 7000 is great for both palm and claw positions. The excellent balance between side button position and weight distribution (which tends towards being light, with no weights) furthers this by giving you plenty of options for where you support the device with your fingers.

This high level of comfort is met with solid specs under the hood, and Mionix has done a good job of bringing together its technical capabilities with an extensive piece of software to customise the device's internal workings. Lift-off distance, LED colour, macro programming and all the settings you'd expect to find are present, and there's a neat little tool that analyses the quality of your mouse surface. The Mionix Sargas 400, which pairs so well with this mouse you'd think they were designed in tandem, measures 80%. One of the old NAG mouse mats clocked in at just 60%, so there's a cool but probably pretty arbitrary measurement for you.

NAG

- Geoff Burrows



7

An excellent mouse that will suit both right and left-handed gamers equally. It's not perfect, but it's one of the best for what it offers.

PLUS / Plenty of customisation options / Very comfortable / Mouse mat feels great

MINUS / Design takes a bit of getting used to

Everyone deserves something **special** on **our** 17th birthday...

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might get your share!



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Logitech G402

Website / gaming.logitech.com

ERP / TBA Supplier / Logitech

SPECS	SENSOR	Up to 4,000 DPI
	BUTTONS	8 (programmable)
	ACCELERATION	Over 16 G
	REPORT RATE (USB)	Up to 1,000 reports per second

Designed specifically with first-person shooters in mind, Logitech calls the G402 the “world’s fastest gaming mouse”, driven by their new Fusion Engine hybrid sensor tech. I don’t know what a Fusion Engine is, nor can I be sure that this is the world’s fastest mouse, but I do know that the G402 is a fantastic gaming mouse.

Compared to Logitech’s G502, the G402 is fairly simplistic in terms of customisation options. There’s no weight management system. You can’t fine-tune the optical sensor to your liking. It doesn’t have as many buttons. Its scroll wheel doesn’t do left/right scrolling and can’t be switched between smooth scrolling and individual clicks. It doesn’t need any of that. In fact, the G402’s no-fuss approach is a welcome one.

It’s an incredibly light mouse (which may not be to everyone’s liking, obviously), and its contoured design proves to be plenty comfortable, no matter your grip style. Its elongated shape and super-long left and right buttons should make it a great fit for any size of hand. Logitech has clearly given loads of thought to button placement, as all the most important buttons are well within reach, while all the buttons you wouldn’t want to accidentally press in the middle of a heated skirmish are placed far away from hotspots on the mouse.

Logitech’s software continues to be powerful and easy to use, letting you easily reprogram buttons and customise your sensitivity settings from within a pleasantly visual interface. A nice touch is the inclusion of a “shift” button on the mouse, which when held down temporarily adjusts the mouse’s sensitivity to a predefined setting – so, for example, you can quickly switch to a lower DPI level if you’re doing some careful sniping.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



9

The G402 is another outstanding mouse from Logitech.

PLUS / Comfortable / As always, software is excellent

MINUS / Nothing

Razer Surround Pro

Website / www.razerzone.com

ERP / \$19.99 Supplier / Razer Inc.

SPECS	OS SUPPORTED	Windows 7/8/8.1
	HDD SPACE	100MB of free disk space
	ACTIVATION	Working internet connection and a Razer ID

“Invalidating Beats.” Razer’s installer for Surround sets some pretty high expectations for itself from the start. In a nutshell, what Razer has done is take the software bundled with the Megalodon and repackaged it into Synapse 2.0. Razer Surround then enables virtual 7.1 surround sound from any audio device connected to your computer.

Surround takes the audio you hear and “widens” it, giving you the impression that some sounds are close and others far away. Some other complex algorithms calculate the approximate position and height of sounds as well. It doesn’t widen any content that only has stereo sound, so it’s better suited for gaming or listening to high-quality media. There are extras for Pro owners like bass boost, an equaliser and options for clearer voice comms.

Being deaf in one ear I didn’t think it would benefit me, but I was wrong. There was an improvement in my ability to locate sounds around me in most games, but others like *Hawken* don’t play well with it and ended up over-boosting or mixing sounds together, taking away any improvements. My family also tried it out and noticed some exaggerated crosstalk in a few games, although they all agreed that sound was much better than my normal audio drivers.

One issue that I did run into is that Surround is entirely CPU-driven. This isn’t a problem for my triple-core CPU, but weaker single and dual-core processors are probably going to chug on this while also running a game.

It doesn’t entirely make up for not having nice, expensive headphones but Razer’s done a great job making Surround as unrestrictive as possible. It even makes gaming on a laptop that much more tolerable! Pick up the free version, calibrate it for yourself and buy a Pro licence if you like what you hear.

NAG

- Wesley Fick



8

Razer’s offering a very smart software solution to improve your audio experience, but don’t use R100-ish crappy headphones with it.

PLUS / Works with almost any audio device / Free version gives you the same basic 7.1 boost / Custom auto-tunes for Razer USB headsets

MINUS / Doesn’t work for all games / Needs a hotkey to turn off Surround when listening to stereo-only content

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THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE



Bigben Interactive “Union Jack” TD79 Turntable

Website / www.bigben.eu

RRP / R2,799 Supplier / Apex Interactive

If your parents or grandparents (or one of your hipster friends, or that creepy old guy down the road) are constantly talking about the “good old days” while flipping through their grand stack of vintage vinyl records and lamenting the fact that their last good turntable stopped working back in the ‘80s and they’ve not been able to listen to any decent music since because the stuff these damn kids listen to these days is simply dreadful, perhaps consider returning a bit of a twinkle to their wistful eyes by gifting them the TD79 turntable/media player from Bigben Interactive. It’ll do things to their old records and CDs that’ll make their heads explode.

VEGAS BABY!

Did we say Vegas? We actually meant London. Sorry. If you’re obsessed with all things Union Jack and your room already looks like an English vagrant vomited over all your stuff, then the TD79 will be right at home in between your gold-framed photo of the queen and that nude painted portrait of Paul McCartney hugging a block of cheddar cheese.

YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND

As you’ve probably guessed based on the intro paragraph, what sets the TD79 apart from other modern music players is the built-in turntable. So not only can it play MP3s and CDs, but it’ll play old vinyl records as well. The table’s got three speed settings: 33, 45 and 78 RPM.

MEMORIES MADE NEW

Not only will you be able to play your old records, but the TD79 will also encode those records as MP3s so that you can store them digitally. It’ll similarly convert the content of your CDs – which is a godsend, because everyone knows computers are difficult.

CHOICES, CHOICES

Digital music can be accessed via USB 2.0 or SD/MMC card. There’s a 3.5mm headphone jack should you need it, and the built-in AM/FM radio is a nice touch. It would’ve been shiny if there was Bluetooth support, so you could stream music from your mobile devices – but alas, there is none.

TECHNICAL

TURNTABLE

Three speeds (33/45/78 RPM)

CONNECTIVITY

USB 2.0 / SD/MMC card reader / 3.5mm headphone jack

OTHER FEATURES

Built-in AM/FM radio / CD/MP3 player / Encodes turntable and CD audio / Remote control

SUMMARY

PROS

- Multifunctional
- Cool design

CONS

- Does it have to be all... Union Jack-y?
- No Bluetooth

ALTERNATIVES

- Your grandparents’ old turntable
- Every other audio player, ever

MOSH *pit*

This month's hot list of cool stuff and everything else you simply must have. Well, almost everything.

► **SOUNDCAST MELODY**

- **Supplier** / HFX Systems
- **Website** / www.hfxsystems.co.za
- **RRP** / R7,590

Soundcast's Melody aims to deliver portable audio in an attractively robust package. You're able to stream audio to the Melody from your mobile devices via Bluetooth 3.0, or you can use the bundled 3.5mm audio jack to make the magic happen. It's able to project your music in a 360-degree arc all around the Melody, and it's water resistant and solidly built, so you can be sure it can take a beating if one of your pool parties gets a bit out of hand.

The Melody's rechargeable battery will get you around 20 hours of use per charge. You'll find playback and volume controls along the top of the unit, so that you can alter the audio without needing to access the device from which it's being streamed. It also comes bundled with a 12-volt cigarette lighter adapter for your car, so that you can charge the speaker on the go. To top it all off, there's a convenient carry handle for maximum portability.



► **CRUCIAL MX100 512GB**

- **Supplier** / Syntech
- **Website** / www.syntech.co.za
- **RRP** / R3,350

Now that SSD prices are finally getting closer to something that a sane person would consider, it's a great time to look at getting a drive that can seriously cope with your collection of games. After all, SSDs won't just improve your operating system performance, but will usually reduce loading times in-game by a significant margin.

The Crucial MX100 is no slouch when it comes to performance, with rated maximum read/write speeds of 550/500MB per second for sequential reads.





➤ HUAWEI ASCEND P7

- ➊ Supplier / Huawei
- ➋ Website / www.huawei.com/za/
- ➌ RRP / R6,699

Huawei has the habit of (sometimes surprisingly) impressing us with their phones, and the P7 is no different. Like its smaller sibling, the P6 (which we reviewed exactly one year ago), the P7 runs a near-stock version of Android 4.4.2 that keeps the frills to a minimum.

Powering the massive 5" full HD display is a very capable quad-core 1.8GHz CPU that's teamed up with 2GB RAM and the Mali-450MP4 to ensure smooth performance throughout both the operating system and while in games and apps. The package is completed with great features like Gorilla Glass protecting the display, and an impressive 13MP rear camera.

➤ SONY WALKMAN NWZ-WH303/WH505 3-IN-1 HEADPHONES

- ➊ Supplier / Sony
- ➋ Website / www.sony.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R2,499

Oh wow, the Walkman. We can't hear the name without our minds conjuring images of the '80s, when all the cool kids would have this ridiculous miniature (but massive by today's standards) CD player strapped to their pants. Naturally, the Walkman brand has evolved with technology over the years, and now we've got this excellent 3-in-1 headset – which mercifully appears far more ordinary than a music-playing UFO hanging from your waist.

These wireless headphones work in three ways: as a regular headset, as a portable speaker set, and as a portable MP3 player. Tap a button and the sound will divert to a set of outward-facing speakers (the ear cups swivel so that they'll rest comfortably against your collarbone when the set's around your neck), so you can easily listen to music with friends. You can also connect the WH303/WH505 to external devices, so you can access the media you've got stored on them however you'd like.

The WH303 is the smaller, cheaper set, with 4GB of storage space, 30mm neodymium driver units and a frequency range of 30Hz-20,000Hz. The WH505 has 16GB storage, 40mm drivers and frequency response of 5Hz-25,000Hz. Both sets feature sound enhancement options that change the

listening experience at the touch of a button. They promise around 20 hours of use off a single charge, and boast a quick-charge feature that'll get you 60 minutes of use off of a quick three-minute charge.



PLANET STEAM

- 1 Supplier / AWX
- 2 Website / www.awx.co.za
- 3 RRP / R730

If you're a very serious board game player and need a board game that complements your seriousness, then this is the one for you. Having a penchant for economics and brassware wouldn't hurt, either.

Planet Steam is a game in which you assume the role of an entrepreneur who flies around a steampunk world in an airship (obviously), extracting, buying and selling resources in the attempt to outdo your competitors and have the most wealth by the end of the game. There's no combat to speak of, but the term hostile takeover

certainly has plenty of meaning here.

Everything in the box is presented in the highest of quality, from the chunky game board to the 300+ cardboard pieces and the cool little plastic pieces that represent how the player extracts resources from the game world. The rule book, for a 26-page behemoth, does an excellent job of explaining the vast rules in a way that anyone with a reasonable attention span could understand, and there are plenty of illustrations to show you the finer points if you're struggling.



NES30 GAME CONTROLLER

- 1 Supplier / Wicked Warrior
- 2 Website / www.wickedwarrior.co.za
- 3 RRP / R800

Even though we never had the original NES in this country, it's not difficult to recognise the iconic design that this Bluetooth controller so blatantly rips off. Yes, it's not an original, but it looks really neat so we'll let it slide. Also, this controller throws in a couple of shoulder buttons for added compatibility with modern games.

Installation is a snap: just plug in a USB cable or sync with

your Bluetooth adapter, and let Windows take care of the rest (the cable also charges the controller's batteries). Setting up on a mobile phone requires a couple of steps but it's still pretty easy, and there's nothing quite like playing supported mobile games with a physical controller.

Pricy, sure, but this is too cool to pass up.

STRONTIUM MICRO SDXC UHS-1 CARD 64GB

- 1 Supplier / Kaira Technologies
- 2 Website / www.kairaglobal.co.za
- 3 RRP / R1,049

If you're looking for a high performance UHS I memory card for your Android smartphone or tablet, then the Strontium Nitro Plus is a worthwhile consideration. Features include read and write speeds of up to 80/60 MB/s, and it also comes with a free backup app called MyBackup Pro.

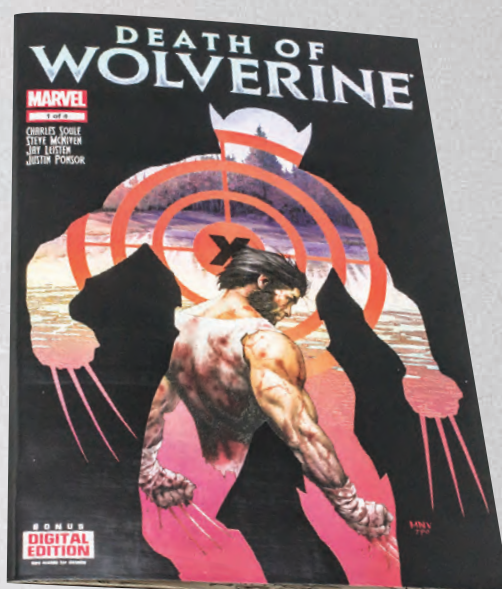


➤ FUTURES END: SWAMP THING

- ➊ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ➋ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R60

Futures End is a spin-off series from DC's main stable that takes us into the (generally awful) futures of some of their most famous characters. And to mark the third year anniversary of DC's generally excellent *The New 52* series, every series currently running will receive a one-shot special issue that takes their characters five years into the future. Every one of these issues has a fancy lenticular 3D cover (and back cover ad, which is a nice touch) that you'll probably spend as much time staring at as you spend reading the book.

This particular issue features everyone's favourite moss-covered superhero, and it's weird, dark and delightfully strange. Featuring a poetic narrative and some crazy art to bolster this adventure, Swamp Thing is just creepy enough to be thoughtful but still somehow safely within the realm of comic book acceptability.



➤ DEATH OF WOLVERINE #1

- ➊ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ➋ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R69

You read that right: this is Logan's last trip to the dog park, and he's clearly not happy about it. This first issue starts off gritty and keeps on going in that direction. For such a short read it's packed remarkably well with depth and suspense, and we can't wait to see where it's headed.

The art is that classic Marvel level of quality. It's dark and line-heavy, and the style works perfectly for this subject matter. About half of the pages are dedicated to a making of, and while it's always nice to peer inside the creation of high-level comics like this, it would've been ever better to have those pages filled with more story. Regardless, this is an excellent beginning to this four-shot series.

➤ THE FLASH VOLUME 1: MOVE FORWARD

- ➊ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ➋ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R229

We always thought that The Flash was just a dude who ran really fast and had a passion for dressing like a piece of rock candy, but it turns out that there's a lot more under the hood than just a can or two of Red Bull. The Flash taps into something called the Speed Force, and in this collection he discovers that there's a lot more to this handy trick than he first suspected.

Move Forward does an excellent job of dropping the reader in the middle of some interesting happenings but ensures that newcomers are well looked after, as long as they can pay attention. The story is a solid mix of human drama and action (somewhat surprisingly so), and the painterly style of the art goes a long way to raise the maturity level of the whole package. A good read if you want something slightly more brainy than the usual mainstream stuff.



► **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES BEANIE BALLZ**

- 1 Supplier / AWX
- 2 Website / www.awx.co.za
- 3 RRP / R95 (each)

These are 12cm (diameter) green fluffy balls that look like the Ninja Turtles. They don't contain any hard edges so you can safely toss them at friends and associates. They do possess some magical properties however: Dane caught one with one hand (thought an impossible task) and when he threw it back it hit Michael's hand and landed exactly where he picked it up from off his desk. It was amazing, but truthfully you had to be there to really understand. They've got a nice weight to them and look like they could survive a hand wash and a trip to the washing line. Currently there's no Splinter, April or Shredder in this batch so they might be released later along with The Foot slippers.



► **MARVEL ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN CREEPEEZ: WALL-CRAWLER SPIDER-MAN**

- 1 Supplier / AWX
- 2 Website / www.awx.co.za
- 3 RRP / R95

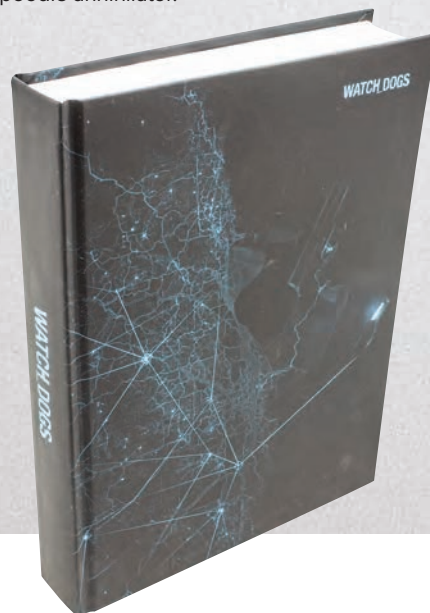
This is a smart use for a classic toy. What better character to stick, flop and crawl down your non-porous vertical surface? It's fun at parties and even by yourself in your room if you have no friends. If this describes you then perhaps this is a good time to turn off your Dancing with Miley exercise series and get out there and meet some new people.



► **WATCH_DOGS COLLECTOR'S EDITION OFFICIAL STRATEGY GUIDE (HC)**

- 1 Supplier / AWX
- 2 Website / www.awx.co.za
- 3 RRP / R620

In a world with Google standing ready to solve dumb questions about playing games, a 560 page hardcover game guide seems a little odd and frivolous. For the fanatical collector, it does have everything you need for completing the game and getting all the points, badges and sparkles. There's an online updated guide included, bonus pages of backstory and lore and if you're in a pinch it can even double as a handy mouse/cockroach/spider/small poodle annihilator.





▶ **MARVEL NOW!** **KOTOBUKIYA HAWKEYE** **AVENGERS ARTFX+ STATUE**

- ❶ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ❷ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ❸ RRP / R899

Hawkeye stands around 21cm tall and includes six arrows with sharp little points. Too bad you can't fire them into your friend's eyeballs – sadly they're just for show. The statue is well made, well painted and well put together. The real question is just how much of a fan are you of Hawkeye. If you've got the whole Avengers set then this statue is a must but otherwise it's only for dedicated Hawkeye fans. It also ships with a magnetic base and a few simple instructions for fitting the bow and arrows together.



▶ **MARVEL GUARDIANS OF** **THE GALAXY KOTOBUKIYA** **ROCKET RACCOON &** **GROOT ARTFX+ STATUE**

- ❶ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ❷ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ❸ RRP / R899

This beauty stands 13.5cm tall and costs R899. That's basically all you need to know to make a call on this quick to market statue from the stellar, amazing, stunning and brilliant movie *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Considering these two are fan favourites they were first out the blocks. The detailing (especially Rocket's weapon and Groot's face) and colouring is well above standard and the statue has a decent weighty feel to it. If you're not too concerned about the pricing here then this will look great on your desk.

GG

by Tarryn van der Byl

EXPOSED: THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT GAMES JOURNALISM

You've probably already heard about #GamerGate, but if you've only just arrived back on the planet from an interstellar trip or something and managed to miss out on the controversy... maybe you should have stayed out there in space, for your own sanity. Because you're here now, though, this is the crib notes version – basically, indie developer Zoe Quinn's ex-boyfriend Eron Gjoni wrote a blog post alleging that she had cheated on him with Kotaku gaming journalist Nathan Grayson.

What should have been an entirely inconsequential non-event instantly relegated to the Archives of Stuff That Actually Totally Doesn't Matter (or, perhaps more appropriately, the plot of a straight-to-TV high school drama), Zoe Quinn's sex life somehow became ground zero for the UNMASKING OF A SCANDALOUS CONSPIRACY and something about ETHICS and BIAS. Or, difficult words that most of the people involved didn't look up in a dictionary, because – all lurid indictments about cash for positive

review scores and lizard people secretly controlling the weather notwithstanding – the only thing Nathan Grayson ever wrote about Zoe Quinn was a single news article, published when the two were barely acquaintances. I mean, anybody could look this up.

But humdrum reality is not admissible evidence in this case, apparently, and Zoe's "crimes" were condemned to an interminable torrent of rape and death threats on social media (obviously)¹, as the self-appointed inquisitors then turned to the press, demanding to know why this very important news was not being featured on major gaming websites.

Just to clarify, this "very important news" – having nothing whatsoever to do with any conspiracy or breach in ethics or bias² – was actually mostly just a lot of tabloid-level speculation about who Zoe Quinn might or might not have had sex with. Which, in fact, is not news with any relevance to gamers, or anybody else who isn't Zoe Quinn or her previous partners.

LEO: Stealth-based attacks may prove fatal this month. Beware of cloaked enemies wearing red hats.



But somehow, the gaming press's subsequent failure to repeat the gossip with bold red headlines and a public burning in the town square only constitutes more evidence of corruption. That's more evidence of the same vaguely defined corruption that was already debunked, but don't let that stop anybody – we've got another reason why your favourite game didn't get exactly the score you thought it deserved, plus leaked photos of some Z-list celebrity in a bikini (or whatever).

Okay, but seriously, here's the real "shocking truth" about the gaming press – there isn't one. Think about it for a moment. Edward Snowden ratted out the National Security Agency for their covert global surveillance programs, incurring the vengeful wrath of the entire US treason machine, but nobody is risking their supply of free stickers³ to come clean about a deal with this week's most hated publisher/developer/feeeemale for article space on a website? Really? Yeah. No. **NAG**

- 1 Interestingly, Grayson was not subject to the same abuse. But no, we don't have a problem with misogyny in the gaming community.
- 2 And remember, it's only biased when it's different to your own biases.
- 3 I don't even get free stickers.

EXTRA LIFE

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Why wouldn't the shrimp share his treasure?

Because he was a little selfish.



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Inside the
A MAZE
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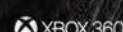
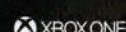
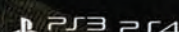
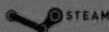
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FEATURES

30 INSIDE A MAZE

Local games! International games! Experimental games! Board games! TALKING! This year's A MAZE festival in Johannesburg was a great way to get in touch with the underground side of gaming, and to discover what it'd take to make your own games. Step into our office and we'll tell you why.

52 MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

It's all very complicated, you see. Everything's all orcs this and rings that and dead elves here and kinda-dead Gondorian Rangers there. Also, the Nemesis System. Also also, three-part Sauron. It's probably best if you pop the kettle on and follow us to page 52 so we can decipher the exciting riddles of *Shadow of Mordor* together.

ON THE DVD

DEMOS

Airscape: The Fall of Gravity / Bravada / Exodus / NoLimits 2 Roller Coaster Simulation / OTTTD / Pineview Drive / Rooks Keep / Super Splatters

DRIVERS

No updates this month. Err'ything is fine.

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Happy October!



October is a special month for me because it contains my birthday and rAge, both within a couple days of each other this year. Of course, my birthday isn't important here (only enough to mention twice), but rAge is, so let me tell you all about it. If you've been before (thanks!), try to play along.

Have you ever been to a LAN, or a particularly geeky gathering? When you arrive, with your arms full of computer hardware, board games, comics and greasy snacks, you're greeted by a scene that you never imagined you'd see: PCs are crammed into every corner; a couple of people are jamming *Guitar Hero* on a console; the techiest of all attendees is fussing over someone's corrupt driver installation; there's a pile of snacks that makes your contribution look like it came from a health shop; someone got into the stock of Red Bull and is being chaperoned by a concerned parent. People you've never met are doing all the things you love to do. Your hobbies and passions are culminating in a single location and you feel overwhelmed by the pure joy that's bubbling up from your usually cold, black heart.

rAge is like that, but a hundred times bigger and brighter. Also noisier, and definitely busier. And unless your go-to LAN party happens at The Ritz, it's also a hell of a lot nicer. Words don't do justice to the incredible feeling of stepping inside The Dome on rAge weekend, and even though I've attended the show every year, and for the last six I've been on the other side of the

fence, I still get giddy just thinking about it. No matter how tired I am by closing time on the Sunday, I always leave the show with a sense of sadness that's only lifted when planning begins for the next year.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

This month's issue is filled with great content (of course), including our mega *Destiny* review. *Destiny* turned out to be quite a different, maybe even special, game, so we decided to give it the space it needs and really get down to the gritty stuff underneath its skin.

On the features side we gave Ben the opportunity to tell you all about the A MAZE festival. A MAZE is a gathering of local and international game development professionals who get together to talk about clever things and play each other's games, but it's also open to the public. I attended this year for the first time and was very impressed. I might even steal a few ideas for the home-coded area at rAge next year, but don't tell anyone I said that.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our cover this month features that dark and brooding dude from *Shadow of Mordor*, and we've got six pages dedicated to our hands-on session with this exciting new title. It seemed a little bit out of place when we first heard about it a year ago, but this one is really starting to shape into something solid, and I must admit that I'm very keen to spend a lot of time with it.

Stay cool, you lovely people! **NAG**

-GeometriX

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Inbox

***DISCLAIMER** / Most of the letters sent to this fine publication are printed more or less verbatim (that means we don't edit or fix them for you slow kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors. It's not us... it's you.

letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month October 2014

From: Roland Allgeier

Subject: Gaming, the perfect escape

Greetings NAG and fellow gaming enthusiasts. I've made a startling realization and though what better ways to share than with like minded people like your selves. I have probably dumped hundreds of hours into GTA 5 which in my book ranks as one of the best games to ever grace gaming consoles. Whilst playing I made a curious discovery. I noticed that in all of my epic carnage sprees, (and don't deny it just like myself

you love nothing more than taking a baseball bat to that hillbillies face or ploughing head first into a crowd in your brand new Cheetah) out of the three protagonists I always ended up using Trevor... So why only use Trevor? Is it because he is a psychotic, mentally deranged lunatic who has no qualm about pulling the teeth of an innocent and has become my perfect escape goat to live my fantasies? The answer to that seems to be yes! It made me realize what a fantastic medium gaming is. Gaming has become every gaming enthusiast's "Trevor" where we can go 300km/h around Nurburgring in a pink Lambo, pull off daring heists in GTA or score that magical hat trick against Manchester United

THIS MONTH'S PRIZE

The "Letter of the month" prize is sponsored by the good folks at Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness. **NOTE** / You can't change the games or the platform they come on.

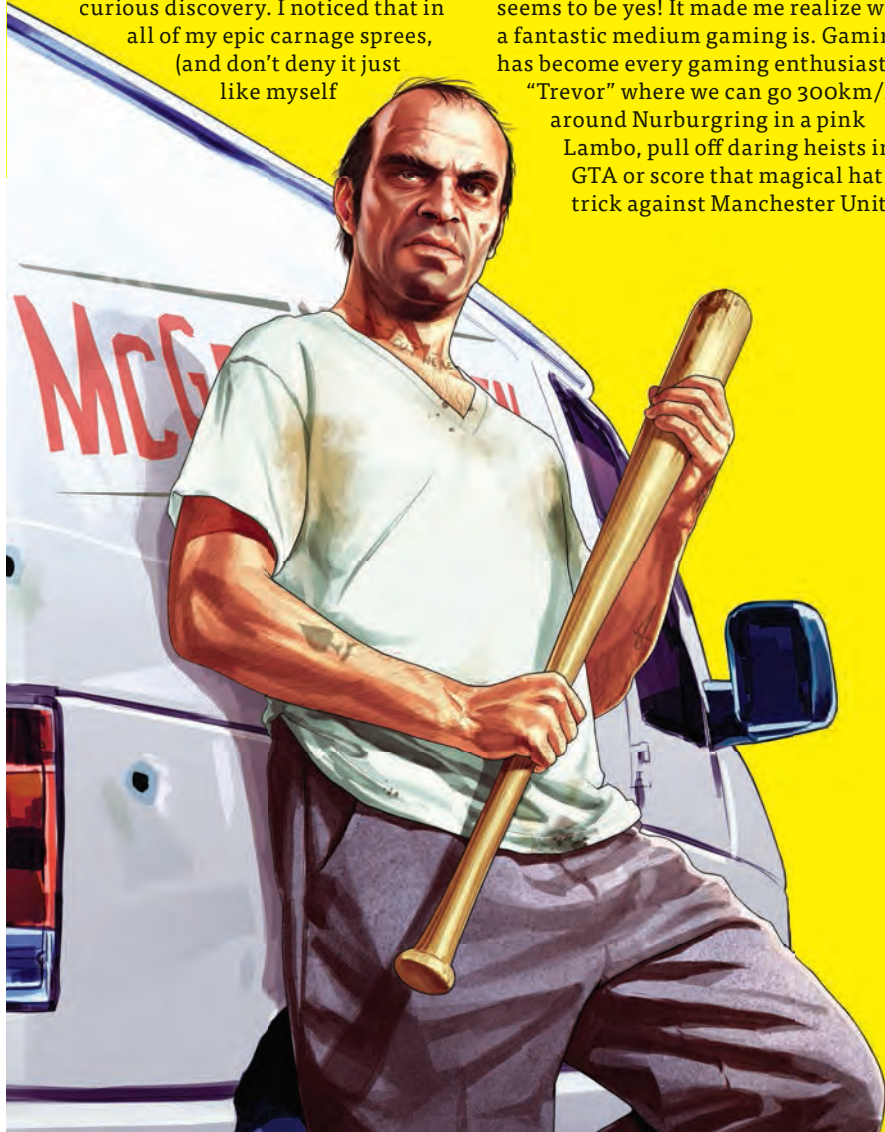


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in Fifa 14. It's the perfect escape from the everyday grind. I LOVE GAMING, and as a 36 year old man I have no problem admitting it. It keeps me sane... Unlike Trevor :)

The inclusion of Trevor in GTA V was one of the most deviously clever things Rockstar has ever done. He's the perfect psychopath: unbridled, uncaring and unattached to reality. You're right: he is gaming! When we step into a game we might get sucked in while we're there, but it takes so little to put down the controller and return to life, while our little world of burning, screaming civilians and epic battles sits happily and waits for us to return.

Yes, gaming is a fantastic medium, and I'm glad that at your ripe old age ;) you're still appreciative of that fact. Some of those whipper-snapping, ankle-biting youths running around with their ironic '90s-era attire and short attention spans just don't get how special this hobby is. Sometimes even I forget, and thanks for reminding me. Ed.



From: Daniël Verster

Subject: Cod of Duty

I love Call of Duty, who doesn't right? I enjoyed playing from Modern Warfare up until Black Ops 2 on pc. I decided to give Ghosts a try on ps3 and quickly became accustomed with playing with a controller. Since then my graphics card broke and am unable to play pc games. The problem with Ghosts on ps3 was the number of people playing. I could only play TDM because nobody else was playing the other servers. I'm looking to get Advanced Warfare on PS4. Question is: will there be enough people playing or am I going to be running around on my own? I'm sure there will be a bigger base on pc but don't have the funds for that right now. Do you think there will be enough people playing on PS4? Or maybe there would be more people on Xbox One? Please help!

I'm going to come out with an opinion here that might not be popular: TDM is the downfall of playing CoD online, because, as you say, that's what everyone plays. I enjoy TDM as much as the next person but it gets a bit much when it's either that or super-leet-clan-pwnage in Search & Destroy. All the cool people who pre-ordered CoD in the past got access to the Mosh Pit game mode (an ever-rotating mix of maps and modes) – everyone else is relegated to TDM or S&D. I've heard great things about Mosh Pit, but I'm not a pre-ordering type of person, so I've always felt a little short-changed by the online stuff.

Will XBO or PS4 be more popular? Who knows – it's a gamble either way so just go with the platform that you're most comfortable with. Sorry for being no help at all but thanks for giving me an opportunity to rant. Ed.

From: Kia Moeng

Subject: Is complicated better?

I'm 15. And I've been gaming before I even knew how to spell 'Cat'. When I was about 2 or 3 years old my dad went and bought me a PS2. And the games made in early 00's just seemed simpler. I mean I was a toddler who couldn't even read a sentence. Now games are so realistic that the line between the virtual world and reality has now become blurred. And present games to me seem more complex than they need to be. But one of my all time

favourite games is The Witcher 2, which is obviously more complex than Crash Bandicoot: Wrath of Cortex. What do you think of this new plague or blessing that has come of gaming?

It's a little alarming that your use of the word "cat" contained two errors: an extra space after the opening quotation mark, and an incorrect use of the upper-case "c", but thankfully I'm totally not anal about these things, so I'll let that slide...

If you think that games have become more complex as time has moved on, then it's probably just you seeking them out. If anything, many people think that games today are simpler than those of The Good Old Days, but again it just comes down to where one looks. I suppose it does sometimes seem like games these days try to throw "advanced gameplay" at players to cover up game design that's weak at its core. Eventually those complexities can be figured out and plodded through with enough game time, and it's what's left over that's really important.

ON THE FORUMS

We all have opinions, and sometimes, just sometimes, other people care enough about yours to tell you it's wrong. But nothing like that ever happens on the NAG forums: www.nag.co.za/forums

QUESTION / What is your favourite setting for open-world games? Or, what open-world setting would you like to see in a game?

Golden Age of Piracy in the Caribbean. So many awesome stories to tell and there are a lot of gameplay mechanics that would fit in that time perfectly.

- Shaderow

I tend to like urban environments the most, like GTA. What I would love is a game set in a post-apocalyptic city that is 100% explorable.

- Azraphael

I would figuratively kill someone for a single player open world sandbox RPG set in the Starcraft universe.

- Grasshopper

One word. Space. Everything is possible in space.

- 5h@un13

Or you can forget all of that and grab some classic games. Or just get a Wii U. Ed.

From: David Tee

Subject: Being the bad guy

Have you ever played an open world RPG and wanted to play a real bad guy? Not a good guy who makes all the jerk responses in dialogue, I mean a real villain. Say, you save some villagers from slavers, only to sell them off yourself, or eliminate a thieves guild to make way for your own guild, or save a princess from a dragon, only to ransom her back to the king, or sacrifice her to the dark gods and doom the world to an eternity of darkness and torment...

Ahem, but also, rather than being a weak jerk, be a charming Lex Luthor/Normon Osborne like villain, that most think is a hero. Manipulating the people in the game, defeating the 'real' villain so that you can take over the kingdom yourself in the end.

And no, Fable doesn't count, because in Fable you do end up 'saving' the kingdom anyway. Really, if you're honest, you play a good guy no matter what (technically you



1 This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at NAG this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the NAG logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.



This month's prize courtesy of Prima Interactive is *Forza Horizon 2* for Xbox 360



Zander Rautenbach, "NAG you guys rock ! Created this in my spare time using GIMP. Took me a couple of hours..."

are a good guy in Dungeon Keeper). There are almost no games where you can be a bad guy, but many where you are a jerky good guy.

It would give players a reason to play the game again, if nothing else, since I obsessively play a neutral good Fighter Thief on my first run through of all games. But then coming back as Daphne the Black-hearted would be cool.

PS Please don't show this email to Tarryn. She scares me.

For starters, go and read Roland's Letter of the Month elsewhere on these pages. If Trevor from GTA V isn't a "bad guy", then I don't know who is. Okay, so GTA isn't a role-playing game, but it's certainly open-world so it's got one box checked.

Then there's the Fallout series. Or specifically, Fallout 2. The newer games are decent but they felt like they missed that grittiness of the original games. In Fallout 2 you can rescue villagers under attack by slavers, only to enslave them yourself. You can sell drugs to street children, then pickpocket them to steal back your illicit goods. You can bribe, sleep, sneak or fight your way through most situations. You can make friends with important people and leverage them to rise to the top, then turn around and condemn them. And the best thing is that you don't even need to finish the game: you can just arb about, doing horrible things to equally horrible people (or nice people).

PS: I'm not sure if Tarryn even reads this section, but in the off

chance that she does: I also don't like the Fable series. I used to, but I'm over it now. Too many broken promises. Ed.

From: Dylan Warwick

Subject: The week in which my birthday occurred

ABSEILING! To the readers of this... You have to do abseiling!

Oh yes what now? Uhm yah, I just got back from my compulsory Gr 11 camp in Cradock. Yes, I spent 5 days of my life in Cradock. And yes, I abseiled down a 47m cliff (1st of my group and it was in the morning).

That icy wind on your face, the cool feeling of being suspended by a rope that can hold 100 times your weight (well, my weight). When you've done it, you really feel like you're on top of the world, like you're invincible, like you've conquered death itself (appropriate, seeing as I was playing Diablols before i left). It was a high of a different kind (unlike the poff-adders' high, this one was Soba Cobra (my group name (you see what I did there (yes i like brackets (I should stop this now))))).

But it was quite strange to be so far from civilization, where the most complicated thing i had was a multi-tool (and the communal hot-water urn). But at least I survived (on two-minute noodles, tea and cuppa soup).

After the DMC-laden bus trip back, I wasted R40 on 2 ice-creams, got home, and upon my bed lay this months NAG, and a cheque from my Aunt for R10 000 (Thank you). Best 2 birthday gifts ever (along with

THE SHORTS

[extracts of LOL from the NAG audience]

"You guys are just amazing ! Thank you all ! You've given me three years of happiness !"
— Connor

"Keep up the good work and Tarryn Van Der Byl stop swearing!!!"
— Kerry Neve

"Please do some proper work next time."
— Flip

the shmexy Hellfire Mantle skin in GW2)

Duuude! That sounds wicked super cool. I'm totes envious. The most outdoorsy thing I've done in ages is going camping the other day. I really enjoyed it though, so maybe I'll work my way up to abseiling (hah!). Thanks for the injection of motivation and your almost entirely arbitrary contribution towards these pages. You are an inspiration to us all. Ed.

ON TWITTER

@nagcoza 

Miklós Szecsei

Thanks to a vicious rumour printed in the current issue of @nagcoza, I now have people Tweeting D20 pictures at me.

Dillon Pretorius

@nagcoza So Windows 9's Siri is Cortana... that's amazing XD. Now if only SteamOS would use Glados. Should then rename the OS to PotatOS.

Soul Brother No:1

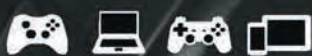
@nagcoza I note this day, the end of the world: 10/SEP/2014 00:32 My favourite Xbox controller had an 'accident'. Curse you #UFCUndisputed3!

Shiven Premdayal

Cleaned all the fans and my case in my PC. Now it's purring like a Lamborghini. Ready for @nagcoza LAN.



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THE GAME STALKER

by Pippa Tshabalala

Why can't we all just... get along?



It seems this is my annual obligatory rAge Expo column. I didn't intend it to end up this way, but I realised that I write something about this event every year. And why shouldn't I? It is the biggest gaming event in the South African calendar, so it makes sense that it's what will be on everyone's minds in the weeks prior to the event. For the first time in my memory it's moved dates as well. Usually taking place on the first weekend in October, this year it's moved to the second weekend in order to accommodate the school holidays, which while completely understandable, doesn't really work well for me, because as a result this is now the year I'm not attending – for a completely valid reason of course, but nevertheless I am somewhat disappointed that I'll be missing out. I think this might be the first rAge I've ever missed. Certainly in the last eight years at least.

The annual (and ever growing) cosplay event, the NAG LAN, the showcase of local game developers, the competitive DGC LAN, not to mention a first chance for many to see the Xbox One in action, which launches in South Africa just before rAge – these are just some of the highlights of rAge 2014. There are also always loads of upcoming game releases on display, and I highly doubt this year will be any different.

Expos such as these are so highly anticipated that in previous years the venue has actually closed its doors in order to comply with health and safety standards because there were just too many people. And people tell us that gaming isn't that big in South Africa. Think about it – these are primarily people from Gauteng, as rAge isn't a travelling expo. Almost 33,000 people through the doors last year. Let that sink in. Thirty-three. Thousand.

Nevertheless, there seems to be an international trend after these kinds of expos – I've seen it happen after rAge, after E3, after Comic Con – to bash the etiquette shown to women, to cosplayers as well as a couple of other groups, in the weeks following the expo.

Last year we saw a disturbing number of complaints and incidents after rAge regarding the groping of female cosplayers and the destruction of costumes, and regularly after conventions such as E3 and Gamescom we see articles about the treatment of female journalists and developers at these events.

Why is this? What disappoints me the most is that you'd think events such as these would unite gamers in their love of video games, not give them reasons to harass each other and fight among themselves. Does it really give you great satisfaction to mock and try to destroy the costume someone spent hours making just so you can feel better about yourself? Or show off to

your friends? Do you have such a need to come out at the top of the pile that you'll quite happily put other people down in order to feel better about yourself?

I think we need to discuss some social niceties. And these things really aren't too hard to get your head around. How would you feel if you were supporting your favourite football team, you'd spent a fortune on the jersey (because damn, anyone who follows football knows that the jerseys are expensive!)

"... no matter how many measures are put in place, there is always some idiot who causes trouble..."

and people came up and started ripping it and mocking you. Pretty pissed off? Yeah, so imagine how people feel when they've MADE their costume and you come along and destroy it and make fun of them.

Let's move on to the next issue that plagues many female cosplayers. Groping. You wouldn't appreciate it if someone came up and started groping you, invading your personal space, or your girlfriend's for that matter; so again, why is it acceptable for you to do the same? Do you stop to think that while you consider it very funny, it's actually a gross violation of the other person's body and their space?

What's worse is that no matter how many measures are put in place, there is always some idiot who causes trouble and honestly, unless they're caught red-handed, there are so many people at rAge that the organisers really can't do anything about it. Sure, they can keep a look out for the offender, and they can ask people to please not harass the cosplayers, but following that there isn't really much that can be done.

This year let's give some thought to making this a complaint-free rAge. Peace, love, harmony and all that jazz. **NAG**

TAURUS: Your game saves might be corrupted this month. You can fix this bug by installing the game's DLC.

Notch packs up, sells out

Minecraft finds a new home with Microsoft



Mojang, the studio behind *Minecraft*, has been sold to Microsoft. The deal comes shortly after rumours circulated about the sale, and it's now all been confirmed by Mojang in a recent blog post on their website.

The deal will see Mojang and all its licences (including its other, lesser-known game *Scrolls*) being transferred to Microsoft for a staggering cost of \$2.5 billion. Many of the company's developers are likely to stay on under the new ownership, should they wish.

It's unclear at this early stage what will become of *Minecraft*, but for now its upcoming release on PSV is still going ahead. It's very likely that we'll see Microsoft sculpt and change the lucrative franchise into something far larger than it is now. Heck, we'd be willing to bet that a sequel is no more than two years out.

As for Notch, Carl and Jacob – the original *Minecraft* team – they're out

the door. Notch reportedly struggled for some time to reconcile *Minecraft*'s success with his own far less lofty goals, and this is obviously the kick that he needed to move on and do whatever it is that he wants to do.

In his final farewell, Notch humbly states that he doesn't see himself as a real game developer.

"I've become a symbol. I don't want to be a symbol, responsible for something huge that I don't understand, that I don't want to work on, that keeps coming back to me. I'm not an entrepreneur. I'm not a CEO. I'm a nerdy computer programmer who likes to have opinions on Twitter."

But it's his closing statement, "It's not about the money. It's about my sanity," that really sums it up. We wish him all the best in a future that'll involve balancing his personal goals with a ridiculously large fortune and a reputation as the most successful indie developer to date.

Icwind Dale getting a fresh coat of paint

Now that they're done sprucing up *Baldur's Gate* and its sequel with their respective Enhanced Editions, developer Beamdog has turned its attention to revitalising another CRPG classic: *Icwind Dale*, which was originally developed by *Fallout* creators Black Isle Studios. Beamdog are improving the user interface, adding in new items and spells, and are including six-player cross-platform multiplayer.

Icwind Dale: Enhanced Edition will deliver new quests (built from cut content that Beamdog found in the original's files) and will obviously also support modern resolutions. UI enhancements like the ability to zoom in and out, as well as a quickloot bar, will worm their way into the list of upgrades. For people who're only interested in the game's excellent story, there'll be a very easy "Story Mode" difficulty to choose. It's set to cost \$19.99, and should be out soon – possibly even by the time you read this.



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CANCER: You may unlock a secret weapon this month. Or maybe you won't. Maybe that'll only happen next month.

I, GAMER

by Miklós Szecsei

R.I.P, gamers – you won't be missed

I guess I'm a misogynist. I'm probably a shameless sub-class of misogynist because I didn't really realise I was one to begin with; people who are oblivious to character faults are often the worst perpetrators. I can say that I've never *actively* played the misogynist, but by me identifying myself as a "gamer" I, by contemporary standards, need to admit that that also means I'm a misogynist. It's a confusing awakening – I've always been particularly fond of women and have never actively done anything that would suggest otherwise. Passively, however, is where the problem is.

I've played (and enjoyed!) a disturbing amount of video games that contain casual misogyny. Get onto YouTube and watch Anita Sarkeesian's "Tropes vs. Women in Video Games – Women as Background Decoration: Part 2" to realise what I'm talking about. I cringed the whole way through as example after glaring example was highlighted – I hadn't even noticed before, and that's embarrassing. It has made me more critical of this medium we all enjoy so much.

"We all enjoy so much"

Do we? It seems like there are a lot of angry people. "Gamers" are angry because the industry is changing as the audience changes. "Games are for everybody" is the mantra popping up online as additional angry male gamers spew further threats of murder, rape and abuse towards women in video games. Dan Golding's article *The End of Gamers* hits the nail on the head: the "gamer identity" is dying. *People* now play video games; it's a pastime that is no longer championed by straight white man-babies. I'd argue it hasn't been that way for years already, but as the audience and industry becomes more critical of the medium and the misrepresentation that's endemic to it, so change is being enacted, and that change is causing the stalwart "gamers" to get angry. That embarrassing anger reached fever pitch a few weeks back, and it resulted in people actually fearing for their lives and going into hiding. It was the saddest moment I've seen in this industry and it led me to the realisation that I no longer want to refer to myself as a "gamer". That label, if it ever was innocent and pure, has been irrevocably tainted by the actions of many these last two months.

Gaming is no longer *our* pastime – it's everyone's. And if everyone is doing it, there's no need to identify oneself as a "gamer". It's like identifying yourself as a "breather"; it's superfluous and stupid. I agree with Dan Golding: the era of the gamer is over. Let it die and take with it all its devolved negativity, toxicity, and misogyny. The industry is in the throes of a massive social metamorphosis, and the bitter, angry "gamers" who don't grow with it can die alongside their label and be forgotten. We're not losing our identity – the rest of the world is just adopting whatever good is left in it; those parts that seem to have been forgotten about.

It's time to change the name of this column. **NAG**

Nintendo reveals new, improved 3DS



As has already been spoiled by that headline, Nintendo recently unveiled a new model of its 3DS handheld, literally called the New Nintendo 3DS. The company also showed off the New Nintendo 3DS LL, which shares all of the improvements of the new 3DS but boasts a larger 4.88-inch display. The standard new 3DS has also had its screen size increased from 3.5 inches to 3.88 inches. The new 3DS is finally adding a right analogue nub to the device's design, situated directly above the four face buttons. This eliminates the need for the Circle Pad Pro add-on.

In addition, you'll find two new shoulder buttons (labelled ZL and ZR) alongside the existing two. Nintendo claims that the 3D viewing experience has been improved, and the new models feature faster processors that'll improve overall performance. Built-in NFC will ensure that the system supports Nintendo's upcoming Amiibo figurines. SD cards are replaced by microSD, and the replaceable battery will apparently get you around seven hours of gameplay on a single charge. The first exclusive that'll make use of the improved hardware is a port of Wii RPG *Xenoblade Chronicles*. The new 3DS will launch in Japan this October, with no release dates given for other territories.

Where there's smoke, there's Firewatch



The lid has finally been lifted on indie supergroup Campo Santo's debut title *Firewatch*. It's a first-person mystery set in Wyoming in 1989, and it casts the player as Henry, a fire lookout in the Shoshone National Forest. Campo Santo's goal with the game is to explore what it means to be completely isolated from the world, and to explore the psyche of someone who would willingly choose to be isolated.

With isolation in mind, you'll have little to no human contact in the game. Your closest companion is Delilah, your supervisor, with whom you'll be in radio contact. Players will drive Henry's relationship with Delilah, choosing how to respond to her interactions with you – or choosing to not respond at all. Your responses (or non-responses) will have an effect on the course of the story.

Campo Santo is quick to point out that there are no branching storylines or multiple endings – this is primarily a mystery game after all – but they want players to feel as though they have agency to react to situations around them as they choose. It sure sounds intriguingly different, and the game's gorgeous art style is wonderfully alluring. We're anxious to get our paws on it.

Samsung and Oculus VR are strapping phones to your eyeballs

The makers of the Oculus Rift branch into mobile

For the last year, Oculus VR and Samsung have been quietly tinkering away at bringing virtual reality to mobile devices. At first this might sound odd: how does a mobile phone provide a VR experience? It turns out that Oculus VR chief technical officer John Carmack was thinking similar questions. The result: the Gear VR headset.

This new accessory device (which is being developed in parallel to the Oculus Rift VR headset – don't worry, that's still going strong) is basically a wireless Oculus Rift but without a screen. The screen comes in with Samsung's Galaxy Note 4. The front of the Gear VR pops off to reveal a slot that a Note 4 snaps into, thereby turning your mobile phone into a mobile virtual reality headset. All of the head tracking, lenses and 3D effects are powered by Oculus VR tech. The low latency screen required

for an immersive VR experience is handled by Samsung's Note 4, which sports a 5.7" quad HD (1440x2560) AMOLED display.

The Gear VR has a volume control, touchpad and back button so as to navigate the Note 4's operating system while it's attached to your face. Samsung is pre-loading Note 4 handsets with a selection of 360 degree

virtual movies as well as a collection of 3D movie trailers. A number of games have already been announced and demoed, including a VR version of Imangi Studios' *Temple Run*, and a puzzle game by *Monument Valley* developers Ustwo Games called *Land's End*.

Interestingly the Gear VR will be out before the end of the year, but in an "early-access, beta version of the device for developers and enthusiasts rather than a final consumer product," Oculus said.



Destiny experiences the biggest new franchise launch in gaming history

Bungie and Activision's *Destiny* launched across the globe on 09 September. Less than 24 hours after the game went on sale, Activision released a statement saying that they had shipped over \$500 million worth of *Destiny* stock to retailers around the world. This amount of initial stock was based off pre-order figures and projected demand. This makes *Destiny* officially the biggest launch of a new IP.



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VIRGO: There will be many chests for you to open this month. None of them will look like chests though.

MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dragon

The creator in us all

I have an older sister that I grew up with during a portion of my childhood. Not all of my childhood, due to divorced parents and us being split between the two. But a good portion, none the less. We lived together during the NES era, and she enjoyed "teefee speletjies" as much as I did. Her tastes were a bit more specific though, things like *Rainbow Island* or *Bubble Bobble*, whereas my tastes were "anything I could get my grabby hands on".

As time went on, she continued playing games, mostly on the PC. Role-playing games like *Septerra Core*, and of course *The Sims*. Though in the case of *The Sims*, she spent more time making hand-made objects that could be imported into the game than playing the game itself. I've not seen my sister in person since I left South Africa in 2008, but we still keep in touch somewhat. She's five years older than me, so next year will be the big four-oh for her. She's married now, and even had a baby in spite of protests growing up that she never would. She gave her little girl our mom's name, which makes me feel pretty good. My sister and I lost our mom to a car accident when I was 13, so we both carried that around with us for a long while.

In spite of her advanced age (I kid, I kid!), my sister recently emailed me asking if I could check out something she'd been working on. It's a game she made, though it's not yet complete. My sister has no programming knowledge, so it's made in the free RPG Maker you can get off the Internet. It's an RPG in the style of older *Final Fantasy* games, but the premise involves a zombie apocalypse. Nothing overly serious, more *Plants vs. Zombies* style zombies than anything else. I was surprised at the humour in her little prototype. There's something kind of neat about the zombie theme, but dressed in her jovial and lighthearted take on the situation. Kind of like *The Walking Dead* meets *Hello Kitty*.

I think it's important that we create things. We're a species that have the capacity to create not for survival, not out of some pre-programmed lizard hindbrain instincts, but just *because*. At some point in humanity's past, a Neanderthal (or even earlier) was banging two rocks together or stamping their feet and enjoyed the rhythm of it. Even today, we as a species are entranced by a beat, which might not be surprising considering our own life runs on the beat of our heart. The first thing we hear, unborn, is the beat of the carrying mother's heart.

Gaming as a hobby, has the side-effect of using up free time. We turn to games to entertain us, engage us, challenge us or just to pass the time. As a result, even with myself, I see games eating into a space that would have otherwise been used for creative pursuits. One can be creative playing a game, of course. But we shouldn't lose sight of creating things just for the sake of creating. And if anyone asks you, "how are you going to make money off that thing you're making", you're free to punch them. They've got no soul anyway, if that's the first thing they care about. **NAG**

The Behemoth's next game is Game 4



The creators of *Alien Hominid*, *Castle Crashers* and more recently *BattleBlock Theater* (which are all, in case you're wondering, mighty fine games) have announced their fourth game, and it's appropriately codenamed *Game 4*. The Behemoth's co-founder Dan Paladin describes the game as a fast-paced (but turn-based) cooperative adventure game with management and role-playing mechanics.

The Behemoth's trademark humour will be apparent in every aspect of the game. The story involves a gigantic space bear crashing into the Earth and plunging the planet into chaos. The bear's blood causes the space-time continuum to go all screwy, mixing the history of Earth with the history of other planets and their alien inhabitants.

Players take turns moving across the game world (which is divided into a hex grid), and along the way they'll encounter a variety of enemies (like grumpy cupcakes) that can be engaged in combat. You can recruit party members (such as a friendly half-Cyclops) to accompany you in battle. Occasionally a torrent of bear blood will rush through and completely alter your surroundings, so you'll have to drop a trail of poop to remember where you've been. No, we're not making this up.

You had me at XCOM

Battle Brothers is an upcoming medieval-themed turn-based strategy title. What makes it stand out is that it gives off a definite *Jagged Alliance/XCOM* feel. The game sees you creating a squad of mercenaries and leading them across a procedurally generated map, battling various nasties (like zombies and vampires and other fantasy foes), levelling up your troops and bagging yourself some fancy new equipment along the way.

Towns dot the strategic map, which can be visited to resupply your nomadic band of warriors. Battles look to be quite tactical, with unit positioning and use of unique skills proving vital. The *XCOM/Jagged Alliance* vibes creep in when you realise that veteran troops will become indispensable, and having to train up a new recruit after you've lost your favourite swordsman is likely to offer the same gutting sense of loss that those games evoke. The game's got a pleasant board game look and feel to it as well, which we like.

Back from the dead

Atari digs deep into its bag o' tricks



Hot on the heels of news that Atari Interactive is breathing new life into the *Rollercoaster Tycoon* franchise with *Rollercoaster Tycoon World* (due out on PC next year), the publisher recently announced that they're digging into their extensive IP catalogue to revive and reimagine two dormant horror franchises: *Alone in the Dark* and *Haunted House*.

The new *Alone in the Dark* is subtitled *Illumination*. Powered by Unreal Engine 4, the game uses *Alan Wake*-style third-person combat mechanics in that the horrors you'll face in the game can only be dispatched by bathing them in light before riddling them with bullets. Levels will be partially randomly generated; enemies won't spawn in the same place twice, and room layouts will alter on each excursion. For the first time in the

venerable *AitD* series, *Illumination* is set to feature online multiplayer, offering cooperative play for up to four players.

Haunted House, meanwhile, is definitely the more obscure of the two brands. There's not an awful lot known about its upcoming remake, other than it's played from a first-person perspective and there'll be puzzles to solve. It's being put together by DreamPainters, the Italian studio responsible for PC horror title *Anna*.

Both games are due out later this year, and considering that there's not much of this year left, that's an incredibly quick turnaround time from announcement to release. Atari COO Todd Shallbetter says that people should expect to see more classic Atari properties reimaged to cater to a modern audience.



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Watch Dogs is still coming to Wii U

Well butter our biscuits – we honestly thought that this game would never hit the Wii U. Originally released in May of this year, Ubisoft's open world hacking adventure was meant to launch on all gaming platforms. The Wii U didn't get it and instead that version was delayed... for quite a while. It's now finally making an appearance on 21 November, just in time for the holiday season. The Wii U GamePad will act as an offscreen map, or can be used to play the game without a TV.



Take your epic RPGs to go

Final Fantasy has a solid history when it comes to releasing on mobile devices, and now Square Enix is trying something a little more advanced. If VR is the next big thing, then streaming is the current thing that's still trying to measure up, and Square Enix believes that the next step for this tech is on mobile devices. In Japan, at least.

Come October 9, the publisher will make a few of its games available for streaming play on mobile devices through an app called Dive In, exclusively for the Japanese market. The games included are *Final Fantasy VII* and *XIII*, *Season of Mystery* and *Murdered: Soul Suspect*, which can be digitally rented for three days to a full year. Each game will include a free 30-minute trial.

There's no telling yet if this technology is likely to leave Japan anytime soon, but if it does, consider us adequately intrigued. It'd certainly do a lot to mitigate the performance/visuals gap between mobile and console games.



iPhone ready for MOBA action



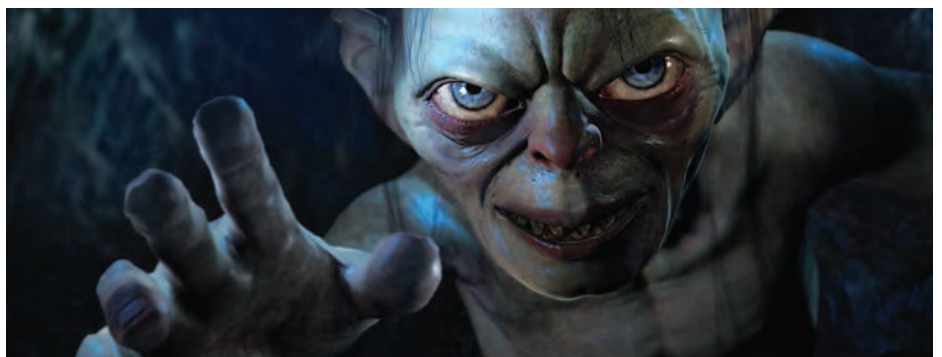
Unless you've been living in some sort of elaborate cave system for the last month, you're probably aware of Apple's recent announcement of the iPhone 6. The reactions were the expected mix of joyous hymns and sneering pokes from both sides of the fence, but from the gaming perspective things are looking good.

With a more powerful iPhone comes improved capabilities for mobile gaming that's creeping closer to something we'd expect to find on console or desktop, and *Vainglory* from developer Super Evil Megacorp (we love the name) seems like it's right there with the pack leaders. Looking like an action-focused, somewhat simplified version of *Dota 2* or *LoL*, *Vainglory* is a 3v3 MOBA from what we can tell from the trailer. It's expected to release in October.

Other developers and publishers on board for iPhone 6 game development (and likely equivalent Android devices) are Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Disney, Square Enix, Vector Unit, and 505 Games. Now that the hardware is getting there, let's hope these teams can push the gameplay closer to the level of games on larger devices.

Warner Bros. delays PS3 and 360 versions of Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

Middle-earth: *Shadow of Mordor* was supposed to launch across multiple platforms on 03 October for us here in South Africa. Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive has unfortunately announced that the last-generation versions (i.e. the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions) have been pushed back by about six weeks. Those of you itching to play the game on older consoles will now need to wait until 21 November. By the time you read this, the game will likely be out on PC, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One.



Dino doodoo takes a dive



Dino-themed multiplayer survival game *The Stomping Land* is the latest Early Access title to face trouble, as the game has officially been dropped from the Steam Store for purchase. This comes sometime after the developers, SuperCrit, all-but disappeared from the Internet without a word.

In June this year, SuperCrit apologised for the long delay in communications and updates to their promising but certainly incomplete game. They said then that they're "ready to stomp" after a bout of personal issues. Many players accepted the apology and strapped on their optimism hats, but after more months of no-shows, Valve has decided to step in and make

the game no longer available for purchase (it's still listed though) in an effort to protect any further damage to both customers' wallets and the developer's reputation.

This is the third time that Valve has taken action against non-performing Early Access titles, the other two of which were *The War Z* and *Earth: Year 2066*.

The Stomping Land was originally successfully Kickstarted in which they pulled in \$114K – nearly five times their goal of just \$20,000 – more than a year ago in June 2013. The game has since been host to a slew of bugs, hacks and roughly-implemented features, and sadly it seems like it might never be more than that.

Japan is not loving the Xbox One

Poor Microsoft; they really can't seem to catch a break in Japan. The Xbox One launched in Japan on 4 September, but hardly made a splash with its first week. In fact, it had one of the worst console launches in Japan's history and only managed to shift 23,562 units in four days. Back in 2005, the Xbox 360 shifted 62,135 units in the first two days of sales in Japan. If you're wondering, the PS4 sold 322,000 in two days in Japan.



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Capcom keeps at it

Between its original release on the 3DS and the HD remake on PS3 and 360, *Resident Evil: Revelations* impressed us greatly – probably because it felt more like a classic *RE* title than anything else we've seen in recent years. Not ready to give up on the series just yet, Capcom is gearing up for *Revelations 2*, which is set to be an episodic series. Each episode will be a few hours long and will be released in weekly intervals, with the lot being bundled on a disc at the end along with some bonus content, to be sold as a retail or standalone downloadable package.

Each episode will sell for \$5.99 (about R65); a season pass will cost you just \$24.99 (R275). The fun should kick off in early 2015 on PC, PS3, PS4, 360 and XBO.

But the zombie-slaying fun doesn't stop there! Capcom is also in the process of porting across the very first *Resident Evil* to the above-mentioned platforms, with updated HD textures and tweaked character models from the already updated GameCube/Wii version (which was itself a port of the PS1 release).

As well as the visual improvements, there's a dynamic camera to help smooth out the exploration elements of the game (although it's still anchored in the environment; it won't be like the *RE5* camera). This remake is also set for a 2015 release.



Set the date



Rockstar has finally confirmed the release dates for *GTA V*'s trip into the current generation, and if you're primarily a PC gamer, you're not going to like them. PlayStation 4 and Xbox One owners can look forward to seeing their favourite threesome on their tellies on November 18 2014. PC players: you'll have to hang on until January 27 2015.

Given Rockstar's history, the decision should come as no surprise. The team has often been vocal on the impact of PC-based piracy on their games' sales, so it's likely they're trying to score as many legitimate customers before it's unleashed on the world of PC gaming. Whatever your chosen platform, you can expect this current-gen re-release to feature all the HD textures, harder-packed details and NPC numbers you'd ever want, as well as exclusive content and goodies for you to find, drive and destroy in the game.

Sega and Gearbox enter litigation over *Aliens: Colonial Marines*

We promised ourselves we'd never print the words "colonial" and "marines" in *NAG* magazine again, but we're going to have to break that promise. Publisher SEGA is taking developer Gearbox to court in response to Gearbox attempting to back out of a class-action lawsuit. Recap: in August last year, SEGA and Gearbox were hit with a class-action lawsuit that claimed the two misrepresented *Aliens: Colonial Marines* at trade shows and in trailers. That lawsuit went badly for SEGA and Gearbox, and the result was a tentative agreement between the plaintiffs and SEGA that would have seen the publisher pay \$1.25 million. That proposed settlement was

offered to Gearbox, who would have had to pay in an additional \$750,000 to absolve them from any further lawsuits pertaining to *Colonial Marines*. Gearbox refused that offer and in fact moved to have themselves removed entirely from the lawsuit. They then claimed that all marketing was handled by publisher SEGA so really, Gearbox shouldn't be involved at all.

Fast-forward to the present and SEGA has now filed a court case against Gearbox saying that they have evidence that Gearbox (and specifically CEO Randy Pitchford) played significant roles in falsely marketing *Colonial Marines*.

Things could get ugly.



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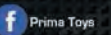
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EA and Maxis utilise clever anti-piracy method for The Sims 4



Piracy on the PC isn't going to go away. This means that developers and publishers have begun implementing clever ways of nailing pirates who download and install illegal copies of their games. Electronic Arts and Maxis have now become the latest companies to include some unusual methods of combating piracy. In *The Sims* franchise, whenever a Sim goes to the toilet or takes its clothes off, nudity is blurred out by a little square of pixels. Once the Sim has its kits back on, the censor pixels disappear. What

EA's *Sims 4* copy protection does is ensure that those pixels never actually disappear, and in fact they grow increasingly larger until the entire game world is blocked out.

This led to a bunch of people taking to the game's official forums to complain about a "censor bug". Of course in doing so they outed themselves as pirates. Awkward. EA said that they have no intention of assisting those who are reporting this "bug" and they suggest people go out to buy a legitimate copy instead.

Team Fortress 2 poster used in Russian documentary on WWI propaganda

Russia's Channel One recently showed a series on the various types of propaganda posters that were used by the West during World War I. Unfortunately, the historical show clearly didn't do enough research because they utilised a *Team Fortress 2* poster as an example. Oops!

The poster was created by an artist on DeviantArt called TankTaur. It was designed in response to Valve's 2009 updates to the team-based shooter. That update fleshed out the backstory of a number of *Team Fortress 2* characters and initiated a rivalry between the Soldier and the Demoman classes. Valve prompted players to pick a side and the result was the creation of many fan-made pieces of art such as the one that was mistaken for actual World War I propaganda.



Chucklefish comes down to Earth



Starbound developer Chucklefish has revealed a new project that it's working on alongside the studio's flagship title. It's called *Wayward Tide*, and it's being worked on by a separate four-person team within Chucklefish. It ditches the spaceships and randomly generated aliens in favour of pirate-flavoured, semi-cooperative treasure hunting for two to four players. We say semi-cooperative because, in the spirit of pirate-y mutiny, players can stab their friends in the back in order to reap greater rewards for themselves.

Working together means you'll survive longer (and if everyone dies, everyone suffers), but being the lone survivor at the end of the game means you get to keep all that delicious booty for yourself. Chucklefish give the example of a pressure plate that all players must step off at the same time, to prevent a boulder from crushing the players left standing on it. Areas will be randomly generated when they're entered, and Chucklefish will support mods by publicly releasing their development toolset shortly after release.

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Warner set to take on the big players

Warner Bros. looks set to launch its own competitor to Steam, if the rumours, patent filings and bits currently showing on the WB site are anything to go by.

It's called WB Play, and from the patent filings it's likely to be similar to the likes of Steam, Origin and Uplay by offering services that include "online retail store services", "audio and video broadcasting services" and "downloadable virtual goods". Of course, Warner also has a huge repository of films that would be a great way to bulk up its offerings and set itself apart from the competition, should it choose to do so.

This news comes right on the eve of the release of the highly-anticipated *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* (so anticipated that we put it on our cover this month!), which could well be the first title to support the software. It's likely that *Mortal Kombat* and *Injustice* would tag along for the ride, too.



Caption of the month



Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random

game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of **Sacred 3** for Xbox 360 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to **letters@nag.co.za** with the subject line "**October caption**".

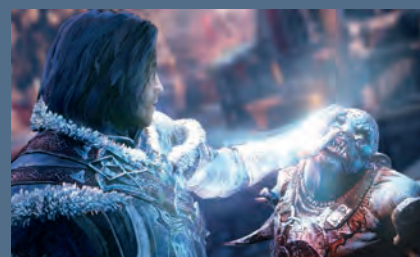
Dying Light has a birthdate



We've had our eyes on *Dying Light* for ages. Between our hands-on time at Gamescom in 2013 and the few gameplay trailers that have surfaced over the last year, it's certainly shaping up to be a solid title with its mix of brutal combat and agile exploration, and now, finally, Techland

has announced a release date that they feel comfortable with.

That date is sooner than expected: 30 January 2015. *Dying Light* is set for release on 360, PC, PS3, PS4 and XBO, so don't go spending all your holiday money in December.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR

"In nomeni patri et fili spiritus sancti."



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

"This is what you get when you ask Lady Gaga to create a music video." - Dirk



SUPPORT LINES

Got a legal boxed game and need some technical help? Before you call please do the following. Update your system software, drivers and have a look online for a game patch. Just these simple tasks eliminate 93% of all problems – it's a made up statistic but probably close enough.

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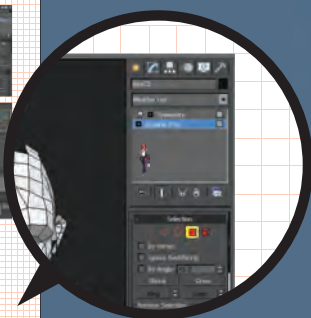
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Roxy hunt

Send your sighting to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "October Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize. Feeling lucky punk?



July winner

Brogan , page 70

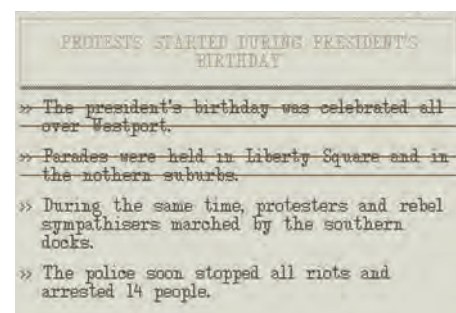


SKYCASTLE

This month's prize

Marvel Dice Masters valued at R225. Sponsored by Skycastle Games.

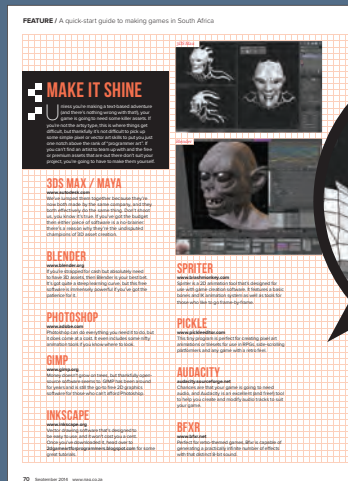
(News) Papers, Please



STOP THE PRESSES! Get it? Because it's a game about a newspaper. Never mind. *The Westport Independent* is an upcoming game that sees you at the helm of an independent newspaper which is about to be shut down thanks to the passing of a new government bill. As civil unrest begins to rise amongst the populace in response to growing government oppression, it's up to you to decide what should be censored and what can safely be printed in your paper.

Originally conceived in 72 hours for Ludum Dare 29, its developers have opted to flesh out the concept and turn it into a full-fledged game. They promise it'll contain a plethora of new features, including many more management systems and a much more dynamic city of Westport. What you choose to print will affect the people of the city, altering the course of their actions, and thereby altering the content you'll have to work with in future.

The team of journalists you employ is comprised of individuals with their own opinions, personalities and families who depend on them, and they'll openly voice their approval or dismay at your decisions if they feel you're endangering their lives. Obvious comparisons can be drawn to indie hit *Papers, Please* and the way it turns the seemingly mundane activity of border control into an utterly compelling and strangely emotional gameplay experience.





home_coded

EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

GEMINI: Its best to take a break from gaming this month. Your magic find is at an all-time low.

YOOHOO, YOUTUBE!

Lague is in Grade 11 and has no special insider connection with foreign devs. What does he have? Well, a series of tutorial videos on YouTube (video channel Sebastian Lague) which his artist found before approaching him for a collaboration. The channel has 14,000 subscribers and is well-spattered with very popular videos.

Skills in video making are becoming increasingly valuable nowadays – having a strong YouTube presence can open a lot of doors and works well for giving “wow” material to your press releases. It’s one of the quickest and most convincing ways to demonstrate your game idea and avoid sinking into an ocean of others.

Video making also becomes a vital skill if you want to submit your game to certain sites and services – such as Kickstarter.

Chronicle of the 72-hour piggies

Ludum Dare 30 has come and gone, sporting the usual bunch of entries from South African game developers. One of the most notable projects to come out of this batch has been a 3D space hermit simulator called *This Little Piggy*. The game is about as weird as it sounds (interesting enough to not spoil here – look for the project page on www.ludumdare.com or www.makegamesa.com), but perhaps the most notable aspect of this project is how well-developed it manages to be.

The typical Ludum Dare competition is a game jam lasting either two or three days, during which developers around the world create games focused on a particular theme. This produces a lot of rough and bare-bones work because... well, time!

Sebastian Lague, the South African coder behind *This Little Piggy*, has been entering rapid game development competitions for years and only recently connected with the SA development community on his LD29 entry, *Infection*. Both games have similar

characteristics: lovingly-crafted 3D with startling levels of detail and mechanical interaction, mixed with a little experimental flavour.

Working with Brazilian developers Daniel do Nascimento and Thiago Adamo, the sheer amount of work that goes into these projects has secured Lague some early and meaningful admiration in the local community, as well as favourable coverage from Ludum Dare peers and reviewers like *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*.

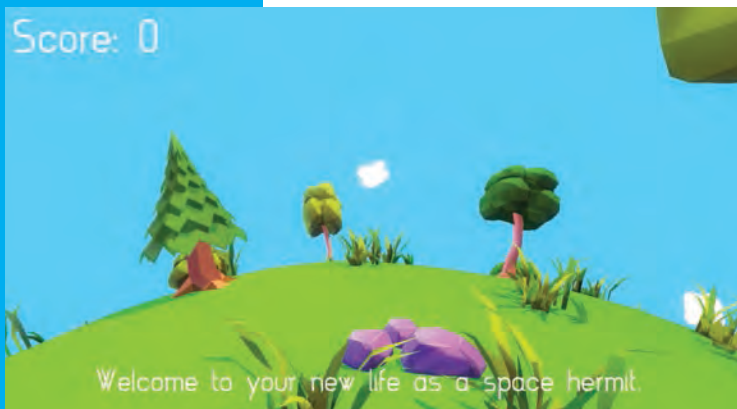
Given how much of an impact raw content and polish can have on peers and audiences in the jam community, it’s worth looking a little more closely at some of the rapid game development techniques that Lague uses.

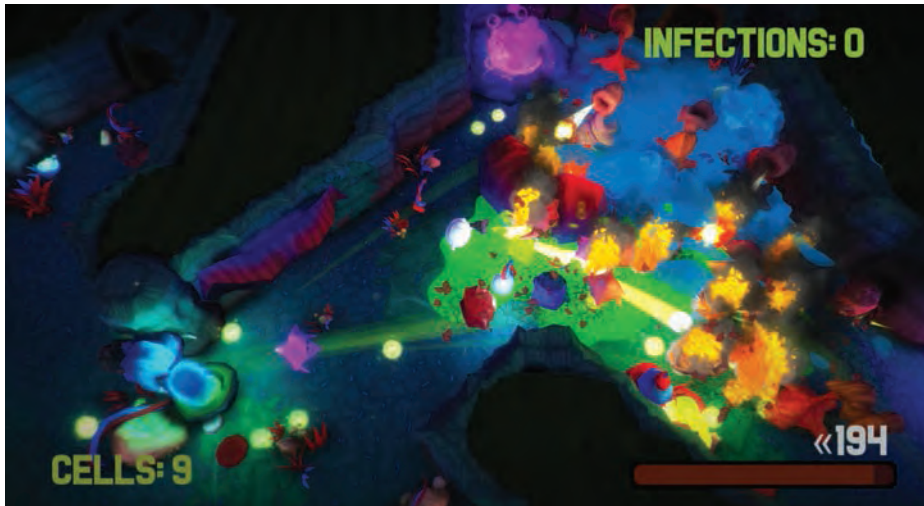
ALL ABOUT THE PREPARATION

One of the allowances that many game jams give to developers is the ability to bring in limited code templates for average tasks. This means you don’t have to drag yourself through boring-as-hell tasks like button coding, menus and other grunt chores that just about every game needs as a usually time-consuming demand.

It pays to sit down in advance and think about the sort of “code stubs” and other resources you’d want to bring in, not just for the competition itself but as a great base for any other prototypes you want to create in the future. Having a collection of random sprites, for example, gives you placeholder art when testing a new idea. Common sounds and musical stings can give your early drafts a bit of audio flavour and help the feel along.

Take care when using these resources in a competition setting and see the rules for what’s acceptable in any given case. For general prototyping, these common shortcuts are a great way to get something out the door more quickly.





TEAMWORK

Unless you're in a specifically solo event, co-ordinating with your fellow developers is of vital importance. Becoming acquainted with some sort of version control tool (Subversion, GIT) isn't strictly necessary, but it's super helpful.

In Lague's case, the trick shot of working with remote developers added some other workflow considerations. In cases like this, it can often be super helpful to work on a mini-project before the event starts to warm up and understand people's methods.

Creating shared spreadsheets and documents (using Google Drive, for example) can also help the team organise their ideas and keep co-ordinated. These can include notes on individual elements that will help a team member do their job more effectively – preferred formats, warnings about restrictions, and particular feature requests.

It's also good to understand what sort of bottlenecks exist in a project and fight against those. In some cases, the sound person is left waiting on the coder to update and test some new wave files *in situ*. Lague tries to help his team with this by placing sound hooks in places others can easily reach.

BEING UGLY

As Lague himself puts it, "By the end of Ludum Dare, I am always mortified to have my source code seen by a fellow programmer." In short time frames, it's vital to let go of perfectionism and deliberately seek shortcuts or rough work where necessary.

An impressive Ludum Dare game is rarely sculpted perfectly. Individual sprites may be amiss, areas of code are slightly weird and some sections of music will feel dull and repetitive. This isn't the best work of anyone involved – but it's the most efficient. Catering to future problems or striving for perfection is death when time pressure becomes that relevant.

The sort of people who play Ludum Dare games are also the sort of people who understand what kind of quality can be expected from 48 hours. Don't sweat the small stuff too much. Your project just needs to *work*.

SOME OTHER COOL TRICKS

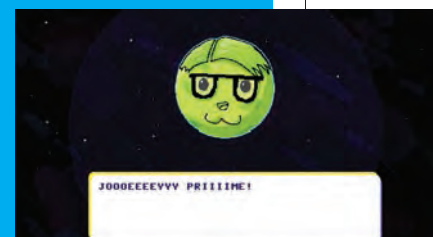
- As Lague finds game balance one of the trickiest and most time-consuming parts of development, he'll often expose some code values that other team members can adjust and experiment with on the fly without having to dig into his code.
- By saving the menu screen for last, his team can recycle graphics from the game itself for a good background.
- The average planning phase is 2-3 hours long, after which the team locks down the basics, mostly splits up, and gets to work with relatively minimal communication. Having conversations briefly and efficiently is important.

Ludum Dare comes around every few months and comes packaged with a variety of challenge tiers. To find out more, visit www.ludumdare.com.

HONOURABLE MENTION: STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

Three-man team Ben Rausch, Jason Sutherland and Ryan Mazzolini made this entry for the 72-hour jam and single-handedly raised the bar for dating sims forever. The game involves helping lonely planets court one another. Seriously.

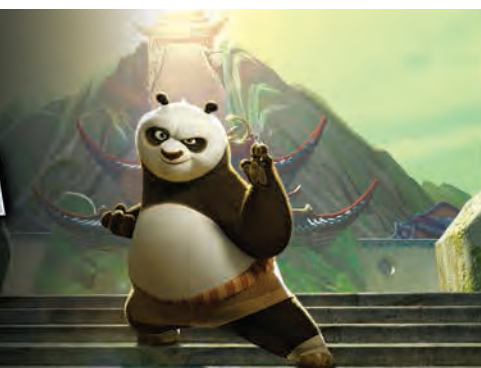
Rausch and Sutherland cracked a mention last month for their work with *Kick In The Door*, and are quickly earning a reputation in the local community for their quirky work. Mazzolini runs the community sound competitions held every few months, each testing a new sound design skill. You can find these projects on www.makegames.com.



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Inside A MAZE

Jo'burg CBD has been undergoing reform for a few years now, slowly rejuvenating what was once an incredible cosmopolitan environment in the face of a repressive society back to its multicultural glory. The reform has brought the restoration of creaky bars, installations of wood-panelled coffee shops, and hipster markets that bring “culture” and a reason to visit and explore the revitalised city centre of Braamfontein.

Nestled on the fringes, close enough for the high-waisted pants and bearded men to still be visible, but far enough to keep some grunge, is the magical, wondrous, and edgy A MAZE festival. The A MAZE festival started originally in Berlin, but now runs an annual version in Johannesburg and is the single most important thing to happen to game development in South Africa besides Make Games SA.

So what is A MAZE? The tagline of the festival is “Games and Playful Media”, and there are plenty of both those things around, but A MAZE is not about those things merely being exhibited for you to engage with.

Instead, it's a festival about immersing you in the process of how indie games (and games generally) are made, letting you play games as they're still being developed, and it's about putting those games' developers in reach. A MAZE Jo'burg is a festival all about demystifying game development, about meeting your game development heroes and realising they're just humans too. A MAZE Johannesburg is about making anyone who attends believe that they too could make games. This year, A MAZE took place from 10-13 September. We were there, and these are our experiences.



THE GAMES

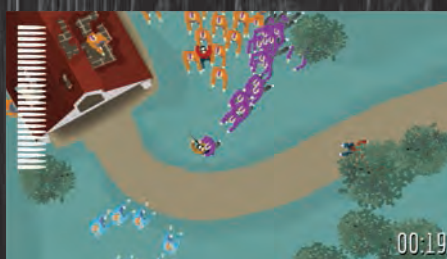
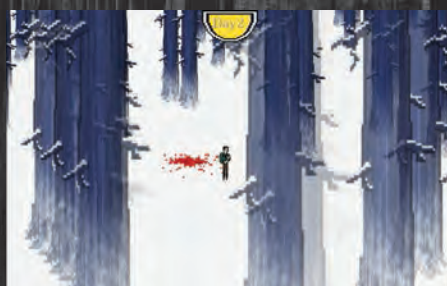
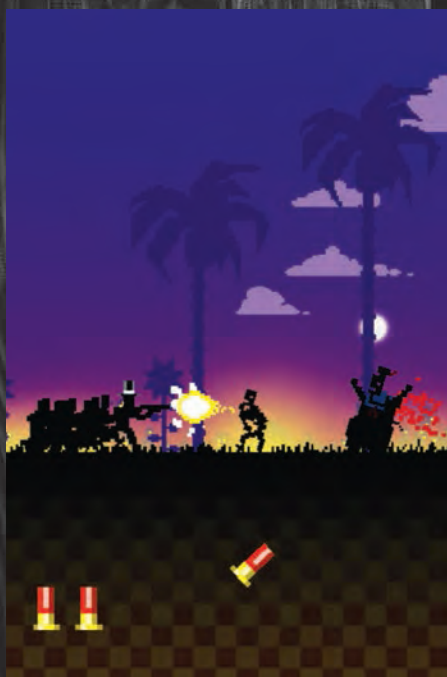


Cadence

Cadence, a beautiful and emotive audio puzzler was by far the most impressive game at the festival – for a South African game to claim this title among international games such as *Nuclear Throne* is no mean feat. The game has you connecting together nodes of varying functions in order to create an eternal loop of sound. Upon completing the puzzle you are rewarded with a piece of music that is so tranquil that it lulls you into a trance. The developers say there will also be a composition element to the final game, allowing players to create their own puzzles and customise the puzzles' sounds. The developers also say that they want to have *Cadence* enable developers to make music for their own games using the game itself. This puzzle title by SA studio Made With Monster Love's future development relies heavily on how well their October Kickstarter goes, so prepare to back them!

Dead Run

The endless runner genre is one that appears will never die, and perhaps appropriately, *Dead Run* is a game about sending the dead back to their earthy graves. This post-apocalyptic game has you running endlessly and trying to save as many survivors as possible. There is a delightful tension as you play each round, waiting painfully long to see whether the next NPC is a human survivor or zombie. Killing the former will end the game, while smacking the latter will allow you to continue your endless journey, collecting as many survivors as you can before you perish. *Dead Run* is a runner with exquisite art that changes as you play, a charming sense of humour, and a mechanic that will keep you interested longer than you might believe. The company behind it, South African studio Two Plus Games, says it'll release on mobile in the next couple of months.



Metamorforest

"Walking round the hood, looking for some wood" goes the rap song that creepily plays over what appears to be your avatars blood on the snow. The song's first line is a pretty effective summary of this game, really. You're essentially walking around a snowy forest looking for wood, fire, friendship and food in order to survive an environment that continually shifts and changes. It is a simple enough game mechanically, but the magic of *Metamorforest* is the effective manner in which the game's atmosphere is portrayed. It's so deeply unsettling that the entire game tends to put your hairs on end – and you'll truly feel fear when you're out of wood and the darkness sinks in. Considering it's made by Ben Crooks, a Wits game design student, it's unclear where the game may go, but hopefully he'll take it further.

Zombie: Blind Rage

An instant classic of the modern local multiplayer movement, this zombie game has you holding a PlayStation Move controller and using it to shoot zombies as they approach. The catch is that whoever is holding the Move controller/gun is completely blindfolded and therefore cannot see the screen. They are therefore relying on the vocal guidance of those around them to direct them to shoot the enemies accurately and in a 360 degree radius before they are killed. Both being the killer and those directing the carnage is incredibly fun. This Dutch game by Glitchnap is currently in development, with no confirmed release date.

Out of the box

Part of A MAZE's core goal is sharing information between international and local game makers, and one of the ways this is most effectively done is through the workshops. This year included workshops with themes from making games for the Oculus Rift to making custom controllers (like big buttons you have to sit on, or controllers for a Mexican band). It also included a multi-hour workshop on creating sound effects using materials from the real world by *Nuclear Throne's* audio designer.

On one day of the festival, the workshops were replaced with a micro-jam, a three hour attempt to make a game with the theme "Tokoloshe". What came out of it most notably is a four player local multiplayer basketball game, *Child Ball*, where you play as Tokoloshes and use a small child as a ball; if left for a few seconds, the child will try to run away from the players. Off key games like this are part of the magic of A MAZE's game exhibit generally, with weird and experimental games lining the entire floor. Some of the other strange and wonderful experimental games at the exhibit range from a game that you have to play with a hard hat and hit the keyboard with your head, to an endless runner game controlled entirely with a cowbell, hooter and microphone. There was even a Kinect game where you have to match your body to the positions on the screen in order to be "The Perfect Woman". The games at A MAZE aren't things you can usually buy off the shelf – they're all about exploring the boundaries of games – and while that does sound pretentious, the games are usually



Board games

The festival is focused on the digital side of games and playful media, but this year had a healthy and brilliant collection of board games. All of these games were locally made, which makes their excellence even more exciting. One student game was particularly enticing: it's an unofficial board game version of *Pacific Rim* that has four players playing as countries and trying to defeat the Kaiju (giant monsters) before they breach your main city. Other highlights included Megan Hughes' *Worst Warriors*, a game where each player plays as a goblin and has to give themselves items to battle all the other goblins – the clever interface allows you to actually place the items on your goblin and see the changes they make and the wicked humour is brilliant. Another particularly interesting board game was *After Robot*, a game that has four players acting as taxi bosses that must take over control of Johannesburg's streets. The wondrous design of the map means by the end of the game, the entire board is blocked up, and it is difficult to move anywhere, making you empathise with the mind of a taxi driver in rush hour traffic. It's great to see board game development evolving locally, hopefully future years will continue to have excellent analogue



A baby fish from *Nuclear Throne*.
Look how cute it is, look at it!

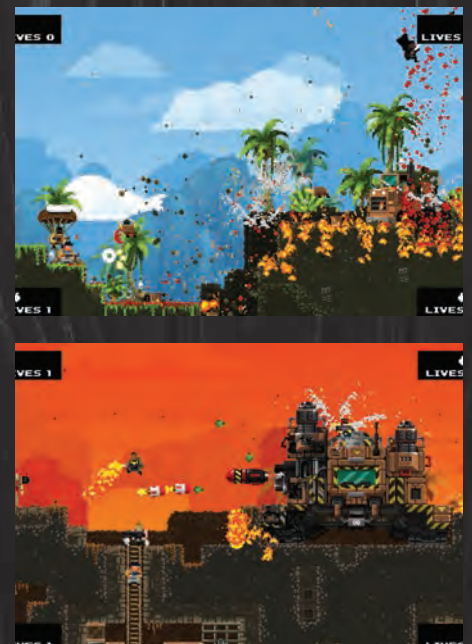


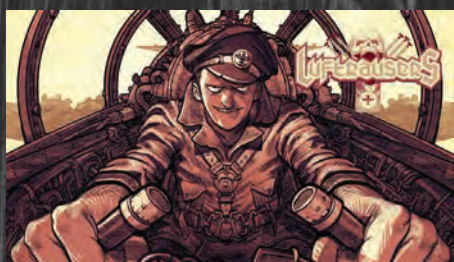
games at the festival.

The Talks

In addition to the workshops, there were also talks by an impressive array of speakers throughout the festival. The line-up included a talk from Rami Ismail, a big voice in the indie games scene. Directly after his talk, he also participated in a panel about indie games journalism, which was an incredible insight into both the developer and journalism side of marketing indie games. The South African contingent also provided some excellent talks, from IGF award-winning game designer Rodain Joubert talking about "Treating narrative as game design", to *Cadence*'s Peter Cardwell-Gardner detailing how to effectively use sound in games; finally, Free Lives' Ruan Rothmann spoke about how Steam Early Access had worked out for *Broforce*. This year an entire delegation of Swedish game developers attended the festival, and spoke about their perspective. Their speakers included developers who had worked on *Far Cry 3* and *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* and hit indie games such as *Stick it to the Man*.

One of the most exciting and fully attended parts of the talk line-up was the "hypertalks". These were 10 five minute long slots wherein developers could talk about anything they want. Each talk starts with the entire audience shouting "3, 2, 1, START!" launching the speaker into a panicked and swift talk. Topics ranged from "satire as a unique SA aesthetic" to "the downsides of fame" to a talk that had the speaker playing *Super Hexagon* the entire time he spoke. Having the hypertalks close out the festival was an excellent way to cover a broad range of topics and have the festival's content end on a high note.





The party

While the workshops and talks of the festival were all excellent, one of the best parts of the festival was the social element. The walking proximity of the festival to the hip side of Braamfontein meant that much of the festival involved talking over a craft beer and then heading back to the festival to play some incredible games. Additionally, the A MAZE parties are something of a legend in local game development circles – and this year's parties will add substantially to the legend.

While the word "party" might make most of you think about large burly men in over tight V-necks, A MAZE parties are utterly different. They involve loud music, sure, but this is music played by the creators of some of your favourite indie game soundtracks. This year had the musicians responsible for the *Luftrausers* and *Nuclear Throne* soundtracks, in addition to the sound guy from *Broforce* who played his entire set using a Nintendo DS. The music is an incredible mix of 8-bit sounds and melodic beats; if they won't get you dancing, they'll at least get you twitching in retro glee.

The parties also involve little more than playing awesome games with a beer in your hand, usually while alongside the developer of the game you're playing. This year was particularly geared towards party games, with a nearby pool emptied out, repainted and games projected onto the

bottom. The closing party consisted of a *Broforce* deathmatch tournament with live announcing and commenting from Joonas Turner, the voice of *Broforce*. The parties are a great way to meet some of your favourite indie game developers, chat to them about their games and buy them a beer in appreciation of the joy they have brought to your life.

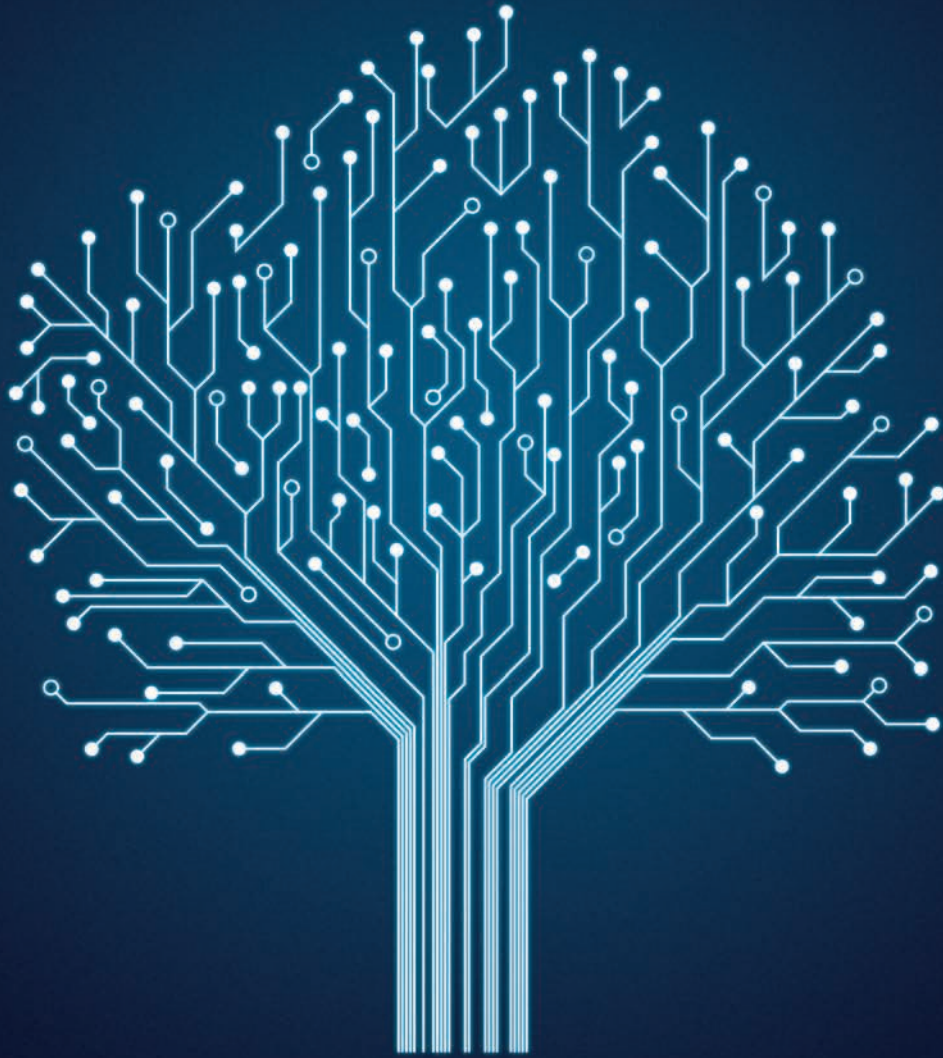
What the Fak'ugesi?

This year's A MAZE was also the first time the festival was under the branch of the Fak'ugesi Digital Arts Festival, and it has made a big difference. The festival was bigger, better, and had more international guests than ever before. The involvement of Wits University, the European Union and even Google to name a few shows that some big names and companies are interested in the festival. The festival this year was incredible and the involvement of these institutions shows a potential for expansion in future years. **NAG**

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Batman: Arkham Knight

Be the next-gen Batman

When Rocksteady and Warner Bros. released *Batman: Arkham Asylum* in 2009, they struck digital oil. The series rapidly established itself as one of the defining IPs of last generation, and with next year's *Arkham Knight* the series is being catapulted into a new generation of hardware. And it shows. Hands-on time with *Arkham Knight* was, to be frank, one of the best experiences I had at Gamescom 2014. About five minutes into my time with the game (I think it must have been the individual beads of water that were dripping down Batman's cowl thanks to Gotham's relentless rain) I had this wonderful realisation: here was the "next-gen" everyone had been crowing about.

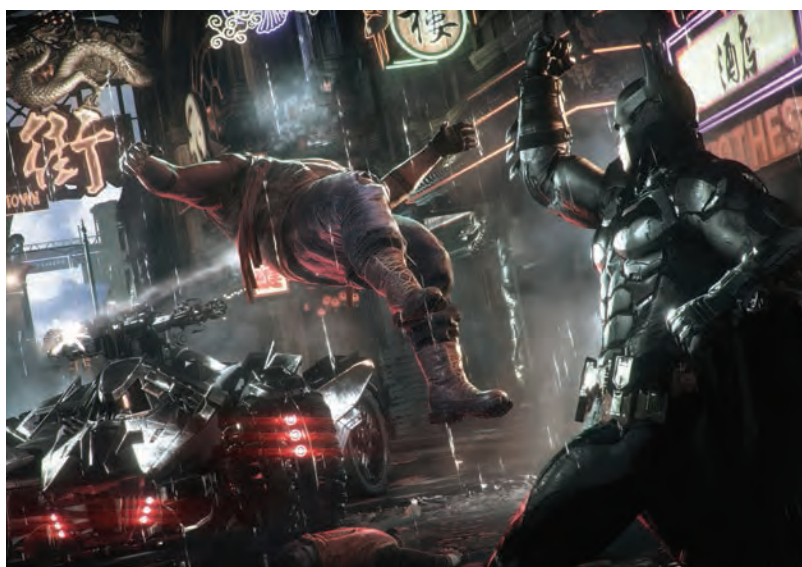
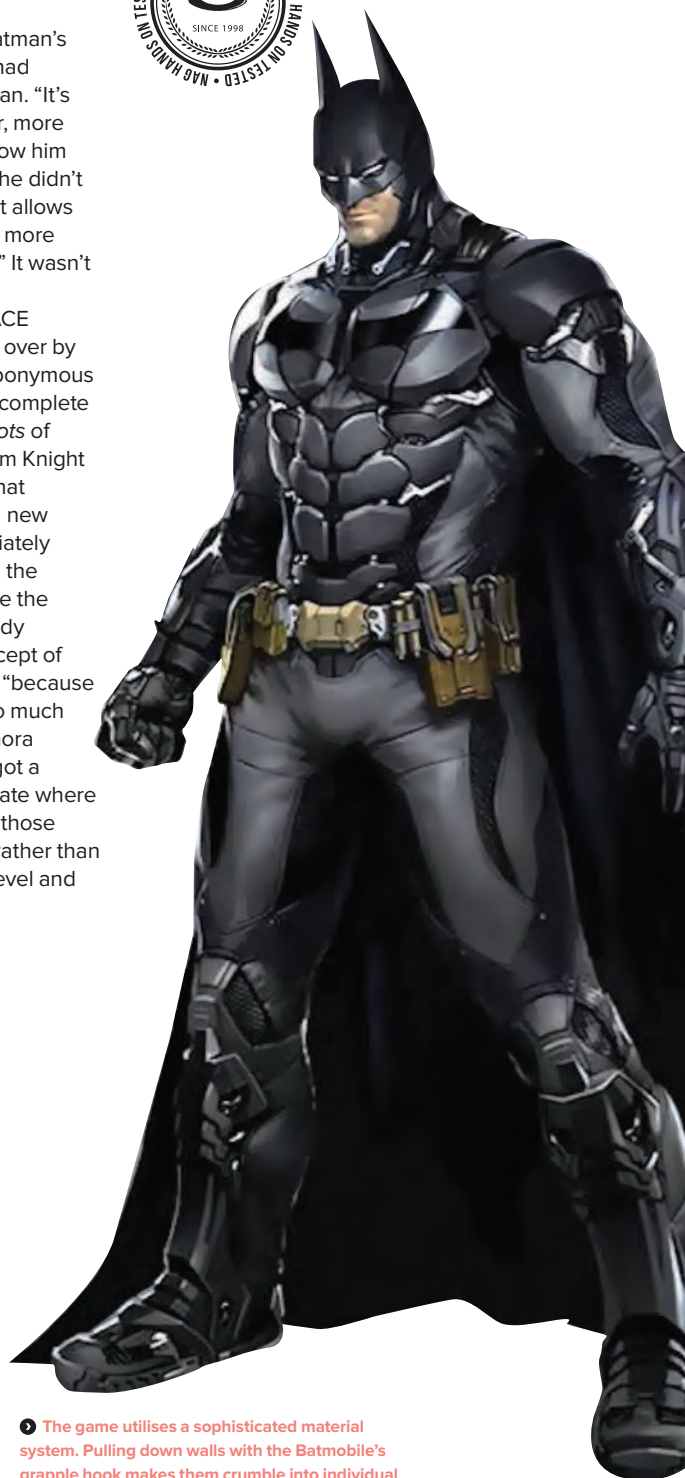
With Ernest Zamora, the game's senior producer, seated next to me, I settled in for a guided hands-on with one of 2015's

"I got a bristle of excitement realising that this one area essentially represented just a single building in the whole of Gotham City"

most anticipated titles. "So this is Batman's new Batsuit," Zamora told me – he had spotted me staring at the new Batman. "It's got segmented armour so it's lighter, more durable, stronger. The segments allow him a greater degree of movement that he didn't have before. And what that does is it allows for him in *Arkham Knight* to be even more dangerous... if you can believe that!" It wasn't long before I did believe that.

Our mission was to infiltrate an ACE Chemical plant that had been taken over by *Arkham Knight* and his army. The eponymous enemy has a large army by his side complete with high-tech tanks and men with *lots* of guns. At Scarecrow's behest, *Arkham Knight* had overrun the chemical plant so that Scarecrow could use it to produce a new fear toxin. Familiar elements immediately

appeared: we used the grapnel gun to scale the walls, but Rocksteady has added the concept of Seamless Grapple: "because *Arkham Knight* is so much more vertical," Zamora explained, "we've got a better way to navigate where we're able to chain those grapples together rather than stopping on each level and grappling up."



1 The game utilises a sophisticated material system. Pulling down walls with the Batmobile's grapple hook makes them crumble into individual bricks all reacting properly thanks to an excellent physics engine. Metal doors buckle, bend and eventually pop off hinges.

With the courtyard of ACE Chemicals thoroughly occupied by tanks, we opted to access a computer terminal to gain further intel. It was being guarded by three soldiers, but with Batman making use of floor-level grates we were able to sneak up on them. I then got a taste of another new feature: the Scare Takedown. This allows you (as in previous games) to burst out of grates to take down an enemy in slow-motion; while this is happening you can now swivel the camera to tag a second and third enemy for Batman to take out in quick succession. A more dangerous Batman indeed.

With a terminal hacked and Oracle granted access, we soon learnt that a number of engineers had been taken prisoner. There was no telling where however, and the only thing to do was to reach the tallest part of the structure to use another one of Batman's new gadgets: the Bat Scanner Batarang. Flinging one of these gadgets out from our new perch resulted in the camera pulling away from Batman and bringing the entire ACE Chemical plant into view. The hulking structure loomed in the pouring rain as the Bat Scanner looped the perimeter. We were looking for signal blips that we could then tag to pinpoint the location of each hostage. "Look at how small Batman is up there," Zamora said, pointing



RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORM / PC / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Rocksteady Studios

PUBLISHER / Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

WEBSITE / www.batmanarkhamknight.com



❶ Rocksteady set the bar in terms of third-person fighting mechanics with the original *Arkham Asylum*. That combat system remains largely unaltered for *Arkham Knight*, but it includes contextual environmental takedowns now as well.

to a minute Bats perched on top of the ACE plant; the scale in this game is staggering, and I got a bristle of excitement realising that this one area essentially represented just a single building in the whole of Gotham City.

Fortunately, one of the hostages was just below us, so we leapt off the building and glided down towards a window. In true Bats fashion we just smashed straight through it and rolled seamlessly into combat with a handful of guards. Combat feels just as good as previous titles, but the animation and choreography is far more detailed. With the guards unconscious we soon turned to see that the first hostage was already dead. It wasn't all for nought, however, as this room contained the switch to open the main gate to the plant.

It was time to bring in the Batmobile.

Batman's ride is a monster – a hulking mass of black metal and burning rubber ready to expunge crime from the streets of Gotham. Holding the left trigger causes the vehicle to shift and morph in segments until it rides taller and protrudes a cannon. This is Battle mode. Releasing the left trigger puts the Batmobile into Pursuit mode. It handles exceptionally well, with Battle mode allowing you to strafe left and right and Pursuit mode allowing you to control the vehicle like you

would any other car in a racing game.

Controlling the vehicle remotely, I ramped into the ACE Chemicals courtyard and proceeded to lay waste to Arkham Knight's unmanned tanks; they exploded in glorious detail, showering particle effects around the courtyard. With the tanks out of the way, Bats swooped down and entered the Batmobile. Guards were now no match thanks to the vehicle's rubber bullet riot cannon; no killing, remember?

It was during the second hostage rescue attempt that Arkham Knight made an appearance. He is, for all intents and purposes, Batman's doppelganger; his opposite extremity; an evil double. The character himself (which has been made specifically for *Arkham Knight*) is all about killing Batman. He comes across as sinister – a character drunk on the power that his military might and technological advancements have given him. He's also wonderfully detailed, with the glowing blue lights of his HUD shining ever so slightly through the glass of his suit's visor. We were only allowed a moment with him during the hands-on, but that moment has certainly piqued my interest. There's a revenge story in here somewhere, and I'm looking forward to unravelling it. **NAG**

- Mikito707



Far Cry 4

Greetings from fabulous Kyrat!



RELEASE DATE / 18 November 2014

PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Montreal/Toronto

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

WEBSITE / www.far-cry.ubi.com

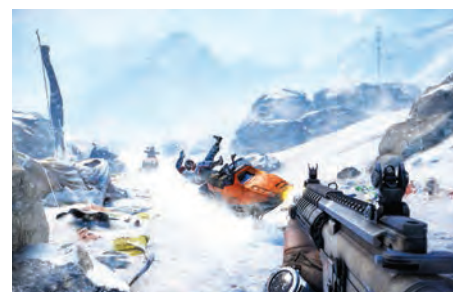
I hadn't been in the fictional Himalayan region of Kyrat for 10 seconds before I jumped off a mountain. It was all part of my cunning plan to infiltrate a militia encampment that was tucked away in some ancient ruins that nestled in the bosom of a particularly frosty peak two kilometres below me. Luckily I had a wingsuit, which meant that traversing the lofty expanse that lay beneath me was quick and (more importantly) exciting. As graceful as my leap

and glide through the air was, my landing was less so as I smacked into the side of the snowy ruins and found myself face-to-face with a particularly startled mountain yak. "Don't get too close to him!" level design director Matt West cautioned me as the yak proceeded to try and head-butt me off the mountainside. I scuttled away just in time, barely managing to subdue an itchy trigger-finger. That was probably for the best as the area was crawling with enemies, and

this was a mission with a decided emphasis on stealth. To the left of me, some ropes had been pegged into the side of a cliff face; a contextual prompt to use the new grappling hook and rope

"...soon I was trying to dodge cliff faces, rockets, helicopters and a mountain of falling snow."

❶ A subset of missions are set in Shangri-La – a mythical utopia in the Himalayan region. These legend-based missions are similar in style to the drug-induced insanity missions that were found in *Far Cry 3*, acting as a reprieve from the main game.



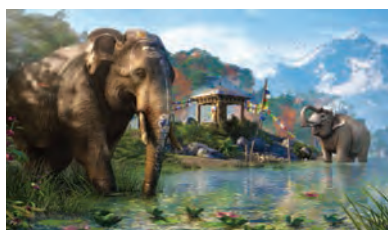
climbing mechanic. I reached the top of the cliff and began spotting and tagging enemies with protagonist Ajay's camera.

Two seconds later, a snow leopard came dangerously close to biting my throat out. Stealth went out the window as I emptied clips into the vicious kitty. With death kitten expunged from the mountain tops (and its skin taken for later crafting purposes) I proceeded to dodge the millions of bullets that were attempting to get close and personal with my cranium. My tussle with the snow leopard had alerted the camp, and now I had a gunfight on my hands.

"Open the weapon wheel and use the meat," West advised me. Of course, why hadn't I thought to use the meat? Meat, you see, is a new means of attracting blood-thirsty beasties to your location, and with the mood already heightened by lots of bullets whizzing through the air, inviting some fauna-based allies to the fray was probably a good idea. It worked beautifully. A bear arrived and proceeded to cause enough of a distraction for me to slip past the guards and throw a knife into the back of my target. I had to use a knife to "send a message".

All that was left was to photograph the corpse for proof and then make my hasty escape by flinging myself off another mountain. By that stage people were rather angry with me, and as I whizzed my way through the air (wingsuit!), rockets flew towards me and helicopters gave chase. With the rocket explosions came an avalanche, and soon I was trying to dodge cliff faces, more rockets, helicopters and a mountain of falling snow. It was all suitably high-octane, over-the-top stuff, which for a *Far Cry* game is pretty much all you need.

NAG
- Mikito707



❶ You play a different character in the Shangri-La missions, and you have a pet tiger that wears chains and armour. The tiger will attack targets and draw AI attention so you can dispatch your foes with a time-slowing bow and arrow.



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Assassin's Creed Rogue



RELEASE DATE / 13 November 2014

PLATFORM / 360 / PS3

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Sofia

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

WEBSITE / www.assassinscreed.ubi.com

Ubisoft's last-gen Assassin's Creed for 2014

Assassin's Creed Rogue is the last-generation title for 2014, and it continues the Kenway story arc that began in *Assassin's Creed III* and continued in *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*.

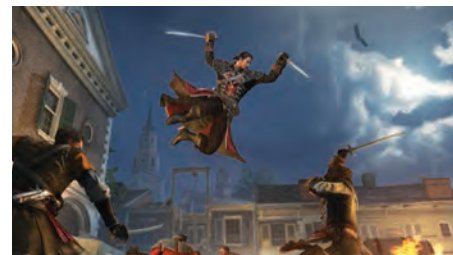
In *Rogue*, players take on the role of Assassin-turned-Templar Shay Patrick Cormac. Playing as a Templar has always been teased or just momentarily allowed, so it'll be interesting to see if an entire game as a Templar makes any difference. From what we saw and played, the fact that Shay is Templar doesn't mean all that much in

terms of immediate changes to gameplay. In fact, it's rather convenient that he used to be an Assassin, because that gives Ubisoft a plot-friendly means of explaining why this Templar knows all the gameplay tricks of an Assassin. Still, in terms of enemy encounters, things will be slightly different thanks to a new Stalker class of Assassin-trained enemies. These enemies will actively hide in haystacks and undergrowth, ready to pounce on you in much the same way that you have done to Templar targets in previous games. Luckily Shay has a sixth sense similar to Eagle Vision,

so with enough pre-emptive scouting you'll be able to circumvent being stabbed in the face by a hidden blade.

Shay has become something of an Assassin hunter for the Templars,

“...enemies will actively hide in haystacks and undergrowth, ready to pounce on you.”



❶ Because the naval portions take place in the icy North Atlantic, there's no underwater exploration of wrecks. You have limited time if you happen to fall into the water. You will, however, find frozen ship wrecks to explore and loot.



and as such many of the fort raids and hideout take-over missions will culminate in you needing to locate and kill the leading Assassin. This gameplay sequence reminded us a little of the multiplayer modes of previous *Assassin's Creed* titles; you even get a radial directional ring around Shay's feet that points in the direction of your target. Of course, your Assassin target will very likely be capable of stealth and free-running, so getting the jump on him is ordinarily the better option.

Our hands-on time came in the form of free exploration in the sea-based portion of the game. This part of the game takes place in the freezing waters of the North Atlantic, so expect giant icebergs, blizzards and sheets of ice blocking portions of the map. Once you upgrade your ship with an icebreaking ram, you'll be able to plough your way through surface ice.

Ship combat remains the same as it is in *Black Flag*, however the enemy AI is now capable of boarding you as well, which means you might be forced (mid cannon-battle) to pull out a sword and protect your crew from boarding enemies.

All-in-all, *Assassin's Creed Rogue* feels like more *Black Flag*, just without the pirates and Caribbean setting. Ubisoft has eschewed a multiplayer mode, and with many assets making the jump from *Black Flag*, we're hopeful that this at least allowed the team to come up with an engrossing plot that's worthy of ending off the Kenway legacy. There are some memorable characters here that deserve a good send-off. **NAG**

- Mikito707



❷ Your ship, *The Morrigan*, has two new weapons: the puckle gun (a machine gun that behaves similarly to *Black Flag*'s swivel gun) and oil barrels that can be used to trail oil on the surface that is then set alight – useful for damaging small pursuing vessels.

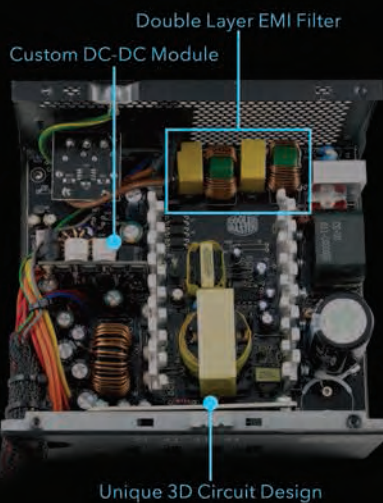




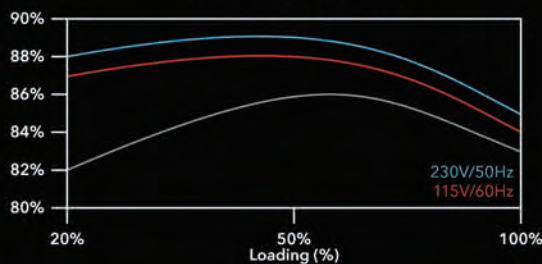
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The Order: 1886

Gears of War meets Penny Dreadful

Developer Ready at Dawn is made up of a talented bunch of people. In the past, however, they've only ever dealt with other developers' IPs, creating the spin-off PSP game *Daxter* and the PSP versions of *God of War*. They were also responsible for the Wii port of Clover Studios' *Okami*. To date, Ready at Dawn has proven themselves highly capable developers, so it's exciting to see them finally taking a stab at their very own intellectual property.

Set in an alternate history London during the late 19th century, you play as Grayson, a member of The Order tasked to defend humanity against a half-breed threat in a war that's been raging for years. Because it's an alternate history London, Ready at Dawn has poetic licence with numerous historical figures of the time. Take Nikola Tesla for example: born in 1856, Tesla went on to become one of history's greatest inventors, but one whose work faded from the limelight shortly after his death in 1943. He worked for Thomas Edison but soon left on bad terms to focus on his own work. In *The Order: 1886*, after splitting from Edison, Ready at Dawn



tweaks history by making Tesla join The Order. While working for The Order, Tesla creates a number of the more fantasy-based weapons that will be at our disposal in the game. In that sense he's kind of like James Bond's Q, and we'll be visiting his lab to gain new weapons like the Crofton-Woolwich Repeating Compound Arbalest and the mini crossbow for when missions call for stealth.

During our presentation at Gamescom (conducted by studio co-founder Ru Weerasuriya) we got to watch protagonist Grayson exploring an abandoned hospital in Whitechapel. We were immediately

1 From the sounds of it, *The Order: 1886* is going to have quite the arsenal. Spanning real-world and fictional weapons, we'll have access to guns like the British M82 Carbine, the German Feederle C-81 maschinenpistole, and the American Ogden SA-5 shotgun.

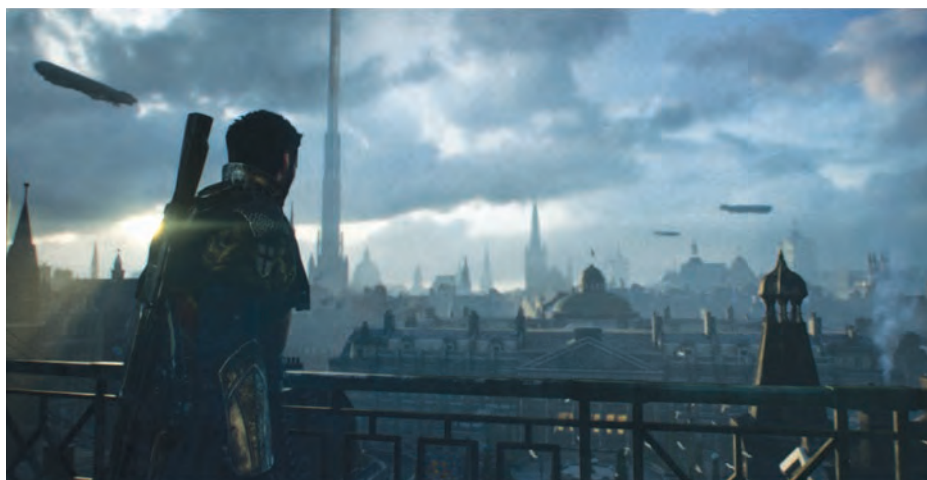


astounded by the level of detail in the environments. Ready at Dawn's art team have meticulously recreated this entire Whitechapel hospital, all the way down to the correctly positioned tiles on the walls of the corridors. Lighting is also incredible, with Grayson's dim, yellowy coloured lamp illuminating the environment in an amazingly realistic manner. Offices and wards are cluttered with objects that are fully governed by an impressive physics engine. This is one of the best looking games we've seen in a very long time.

Eventually this exploration led Grayson to cross paths with a lycanthrope. The confrontation was brutal, but also presented us with a potential caveat for this game: quick time events. We were surprised by how scripted the game appeared during this particular sequence and presentation. Gameplay moved seamlessly into in-engine cut-scenes, many of which included QTEs. Failing QTEs resulted in the lycan murdering Grayson (in some particularly gory ways) and having to reattempt the sequence. Ready at Dawn has always had a "filmic vision" for *The Order* and has deliberately chosen lens effects and letterbox aspect ratios to convey a motion picture tone, so the inclusion of scripted events and QTEs is probably par for the course. While it might turn some people off, it certainly isn't enough for us to ignore this game – it's looking fantastic and we can't wait to get our hands on it. **NAG**

- Mikito707

"This is one of the best looking games we've seen in a very long time."



1 At times, *The Order: 1886* is pretty creepy. Its apparent, liberal use of scripted sequences and cinematic camera angles gives the game a horror movie feel.



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RELEASE DATE / 19 November 2014

PLATFORM / PS3 / PS4

GENRE / Platformer

DEVELOPER / Sumo Digital

PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment

WEBSITE / www.littlebigplanet.playstation.com

LittleBigPlanet 3



A deeper look at the game's upgraded Create mode

Gather around, creative types, because *LittleBigPlanet 3* is about to throw every Create tool conceivable right at your pretty faces. The three pillars of Play, Create and Share remain central to the *LittleBigPlanet* franchise, but developer Sumo Digital recently took the time to provide further details on the Create portion of upcoming *LittleBigPlanet 3*.

Creating amazing content in the *LittleBigPlanet* games can sometimes be tricky, but Sumo believes they've developed the most accessible version of the Create tools for *LittleBigPlanet 3*. The magnitude of tools at your disposal might seem intimidating considering there are now over 70 new Create tools. Some of those (29 to be exact) are enhanced tools that first made an appearance in *LittleBigPlanet 2*, and another 10 of them are reworked tools from *LittleBigPlanet* for PlayStation Vita.

Those familiar with *LittleBigPlanet* will know that the game's levels have always had three layers of depth to them. For *LittleBigPlanet 3* the number of level depths has been raised to 16. This provides a massive increase in three-dimensional properties to the levels of *LittleBigPlanet 3*, which in turn



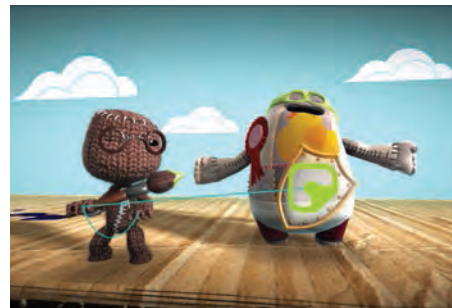
means increased potential for some clever level design. You'll be able to use the new Layer Launcher tool to fling Sackboy and pals between the various depths. You'll also be able to create slides that connect foreground and background portions of the play space.

A new Bendy Rail too allows you to create roller-coaster type rails across the 16 layer depths of your levels. The rails can be made invisible, which means you could make (for example) space ships that fly a pre-determined flight path.

LittleBigPlanet 3 sees the introduction of another three playable characters: Oddsock,



To date, the *LittleBigPlanet* creative community has logged more than 42 million hours spent designing levels. The community has produced nearly 9 million unique levels across different versions of the game. Every one of those 9 million levels will be playable on the PlayStation 4 version of *LittleBigPlanet 3*.



"...there are now over 70 new Create tools"



Swoop and Toggle. Each of these characters has a unique ability, but in Create mode you're free to make your own character traits for use in your custom levels. That means if you wanted to make a Sackboy who can fly and shoot fireballs from his butt, you'll be able to. If you'd rather provide temporary abilities, a new Power Up Creation Tool lets you do just that: utilise any object in the game and attach it to a Blaster Handle, and you'll be free to add a property to whatever it is you just invented. During our presentation we were shown a power-up called the Drill-o-nator that was quickly slapped together in Create mode in order to allow Sackboy to drill through some rocks.

Finally, Sumo has turned the PlayStation 4 controller's touchpad into a mini artist tablet, which means you can now hand-draw your own stickers to customise your levels.

While we're excited for more Sackboy adventures in *LittleBigPlanet 3*, we're even more excited to see what the Create community does with this new suite of development tools.

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RELEASE DATE / 7 October 2014
PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO
GENRE / Survival horror
DEVELOPER / The Creative Assembly
PUBLISHER / SEGA
WEBSITE / www.alienisolation.com

Alien: Isolation



All other priorities rescinded

There are 57 years between the events of *Alien* and *Aliens*. At the end of the first movie, Ellen Ripley gets into a stasis pod with Jonesy the cat. At the start of the sequel, both of them are rescued from the *Nostromo*, and returned to Earth. What happened during that time out in space, and why is Jonesy so much bigger now? In *Alien: Isolation*, we'll find out the answer to one of those questions (maybe). As for the other question, Jonesy was apparently played by four different cats so Weyland-Yutani can close that file, at least.

Strapping into the overalls of Amanda Ripley, you'll be shipping off to the Sevastopol – a decommissioned space station in orbit around the gas giant KG348 – ostensibly to look around for the *Nostromo*'s flight recorder but much more probably to play uninformed Codename-X Experiment Subject

#8 in another one of "The Company's" (un) controlled lab tests.

Putting both the "survival" and "horror" into "survival horror", the Xenomorph in *Alien: Isolation* can't be killed, and a single hit from it means game over, man, game over. Also, its AI learns from previous encounters with you (in reality, a series of increasingly complex behaviours that present over the course of the game), and if it notices something out of the ordinary – an opened locker, for example – it will look for the person responsible. There's also no on-screen HUD, and doing pretty much anything makes a noise. During my hands-on session at Gamescom, I lasted approximately one minute before dying. Both times. Part of that was because I was too busy looking at the motion tracker to pay attention to what was actually going on in front of me,

but I suppose that's the whole point. Somewhere nearby, perhaps, an inconspicuous looking man with a clipboard made a note about it.

"Subject continues to demonstrate total incompetence. Recommend additional testing. LOL." **NAG**

- Azimuth

"During my hands-on session at Gamescom, I lasted approximately one minute before dying. Both times."

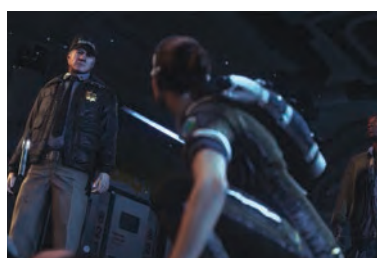


BUILDING BETTER WORLDS

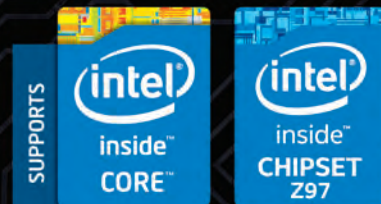
To maintain aesthetic consistency with Ridley Scott's *Alien* film, released in 1979, the game features the same contemporary lo-fi, retro-future design. Much like the *Nostromo*, the Sevastopol space station is fitted with bulky, monochromatic CRT monitors, analogue push-buttons, and a preponderance of important-looking dials and switches that are already obsolete in 2014, nevermind more than a hundred years from now. Recreating the VHS-style special effects, the team also recorded UI elements and game footage to tape, played them back on a cheap portable TV while using magnets and cable disconnections to distort the image, and then re-recorded all of that over a tape copy of the movie so that "if any bled through, it would be the film". It's the only way to be sure.



▶ In the DVD release of *Aliens*, a scene deleted from previous versions of the movie reveals that Ellen Ripley's daughter – Amanda Ripley – grew up and died during her hypersleep. Conveniently, the scene does not mention whether or not she visited any derelict space stations looking for Mommy, so everything that happens in *Alien: Isolation* totally happened.



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LEGO Batman 3: Beyond Gotham

Holy fan service, Batman!

In the DC comic book series, Brainiac is an extra-terrestrial android (except when he isn't) boasting "12th-level intellect" and straight As in the fields of maths, engineering, physics, theoretical science, alien technology, with telekinetic and telepathic powers. Every comic book supervillain has a "thing", of course, and Brainiac's "thing" – when he isn't complaining on Reddit about how nice guys finish last, anyway – is using his

Hyper-Force Shrink-Ray and/or the Lantern Rings to cram cities and even whole planets into glass jars as part of the most inscrutable universe domination plan ever that totally has nothing whatsoever to do with compensating for anything. Or maybe he just really likes snowglobes.

Much more important to us at the moment, however, is that he's coming for Earth, and it's up to Batman and his superhero speed-dial contacts to save the world. To the Batsuit!

No, the *other* Batsuit. The one built for interstellar travel with the built-in, patent-pending Wayne Aerospace Body Fluid-O-Rang, Alfred. WE'RE GOING TO SPAAAAACE.

"...he's coming for Earth, and it's up to Batman and his superhero speed-dial contacts to save the world."



GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL

The line-up of playable characters in *LEGO Batman 3* spans the obvious and the obscure in what our host at the Gamescom developer presentation described as "a love letter to Batman fans" (presumably laminated for its own safety). Characters like Aquaman, Black Adam, Flash, General Zod, Cyborg, Nightwing, Shazam, Martian Manhunter, Wonder Woman, Doomsday, Sinestro, Mr. Freeze, Clayface, Jor-El, Scarecrow, Two-Face, Lex Luthor, Green Arrow, Deathstroke, Killer Croc, Batgirl, and Harley Quinn join frames with Beast Boy, Krypto, Blue Beetle, Black Manta, Stargirl, Mr. Mxyzptlk, and... Bat-Cow in a who's who of nerd quiz blanks. In total, more than 150 characters are featured in the game, more than any other LEGO game released previously.

RELEASE DATE / 14 November 2014

PLATFORMS / 360 / 3DS / PC / PS3 / PS4 / PSV / Wii U / XBO

GENRE / Action adventure

DEVELOPER / Traveller's Tales

PUBLISHER / Warner Bros. Interactive

WEBSITE / videogames.lego.com/en-us/lego-batman-3



1 *LEGO Batman 3* is the first LEGO game to include a season pass, spanning six DLC add-ons featuring additional characters and vehicles, plus extra levels and bonus achievements and trophies.



2 Without spoiling too much of the story, you can expect a lot of the characters to display... uncharacteristic behaviour. Joker suddenly can't say enough nice things about Batman, for example, and Flash has become a bit of a kleptomaniac.

With almost 20 games already launched in the LEGO series, you probably already know what you're getting with this one – loads of unlockable characters (including a mega-campy 1960s Batman voiced by – KAPOW! – the original mega-campy 1960s Batman Adam West, complete with proper "KAPOW!" icons because it wouldn't be the same without them), and a whole lot of building and busting things. New in *LEGO Batman 3*, though, is what the marketing blurbs are dubbing "zero-G gameplay", or basically retro-arcade sequences where you zip around in a spaceship, grabbing power-ups and blasting bad guys. You know, just like you did with your real LEGO when you were 10. Or 35. Or whatever. It's cool, I also have a LEGO X-Wing on my desk that I use to, um, express myself from time to time. We could start a club or something. **NAG**

- Azimuth



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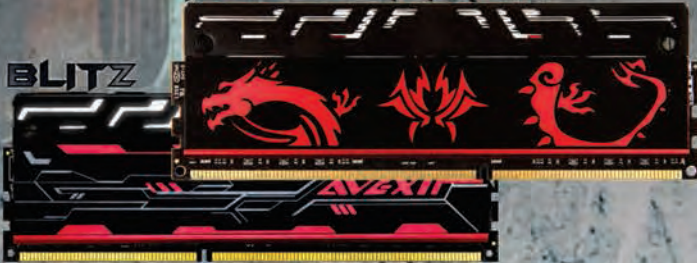
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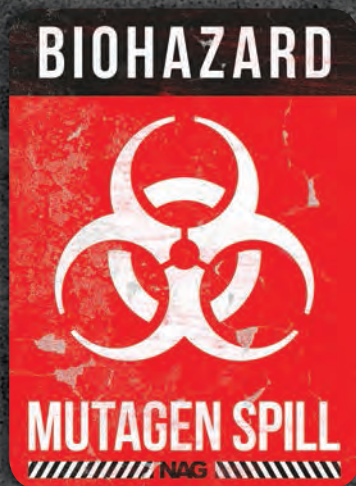


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NAG AND RAGE GAMING MOUSE PADS

RELEASE DATE / 3 October (PC / PS4 / XBO), 21 November (360/PS3)

One does not simply walk into Mordor

By now, it's not exactly a secret kept safe or otherwise that the Wraith who has taken up unexpected residence in Talion's body is Celebrimbor, although those of you who haven't read the books – or, more specifically, *The Silmarillion*, a collection of supporting narratives published posthumously by JRR Tolkien's son, Christopher Tolkien – might not immediately recognise his significance in Middle-earth's ongoing saga. Simply, he's the elf who, thousands of years previously,

worked together with Sauron to forge the Rings of Power. Back then, of course, Sauron was just one of the Maiar, a sort of angel, who was only just becoming the corrupted mess of Baroque power fantasies he later (dis)embodied after discovering goth music and an interest in jewellery and politics (more or less). Celebrimbor himself was a Noldorin prince who was subsequently tortured and killed by his new bestie, but I'll leave it up to the game to tell the rest of that sorry story – in the meantime, cue the record scratch and sitcom jingle, Celebrimbor and Talion are now stuck together, for better or for worse, and not even death can part them because technically they're both already dead. But not exactly dead, either.



The broken sword Talion is carrying on the game's cover is not Narsil, the broken sword Aragorn carries in *The Lord of the Rings*, but rather, the remains of his son's sword, Acham. The resemblance is probably not *entirely* accidental.

Chronologically, the events of *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* take place between the end of *The Hobbit* and the start of *The Lord of the Rings*, around about the same time that Sauron is renovating his *Supervillain Monthly's* Top 10 Fortresses of the Second Age first place winner, Barad-dûr, and mustering his Orc armies to march on everywhere else. This is all totally unbeknownst, as they say in High Fantasylish, to the watchful Rangers of Gondor, who, apparently not quite so watchful as they should have been, are caught “completely unprepared” for any aggressive expansion policy from the east, as game designer Michael De Plater explained during a presentation at Gamescom. And so it happened that

"The ability to defy death, enemies, to bend their will to mate them," said De Plater. "In you are becoming a monster as you are in the Land of Shadow. Conquering their greatest fear."

"You are becoming a monster to the monsters in the Land of Shadow. You're becoming their greatest fear."



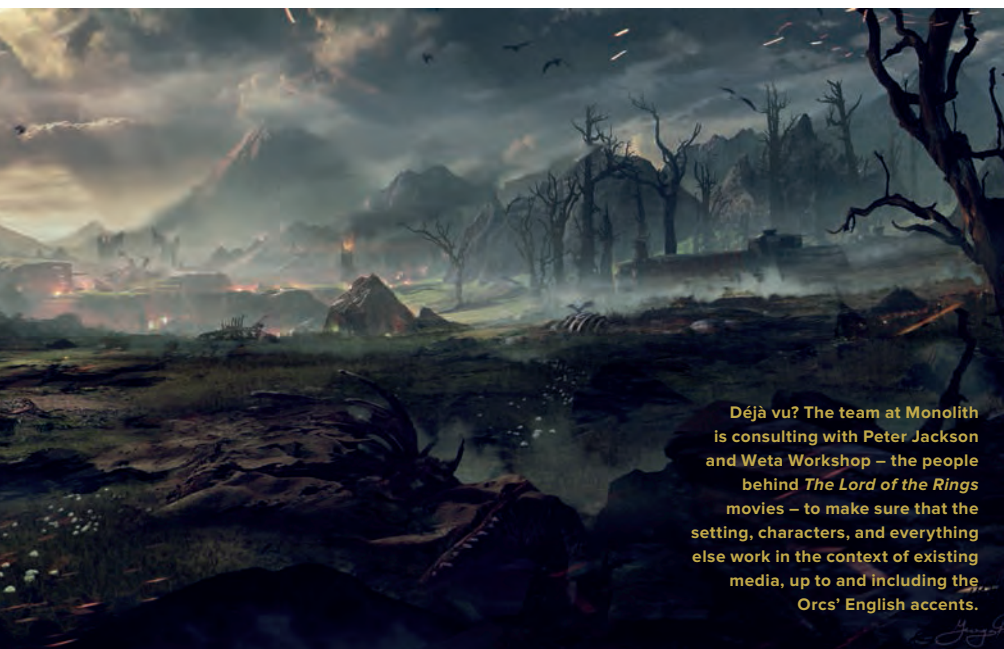
• ՆՃԻԿ Ն ԲԱՐԿԱԾԻ •

THE BLACK GATE OPENS

Because we already know that we won't be killing Sauron in *Shadow of Mordor* (that's a story for another time, boys and girls), his three Black Captains are the big bads of the game instead. Described by Monolith's designers as the "three aspects of Sauron", each one of the Black Captains represents some part of him, like an evil dating profile come to hideous life. Sort of.

First up, there's the Black Hand – Sauron's lying and deceitful side – who, being responsible for murdering Talion and his family, will likely be the primary antagonist in the game. Then there's The Hammer, who was once a man, but decided to pursue new career opportunities as an avatar of Sauron's merciless mastery on the battlefield. Finally, we've got The Tower, a gigantic Black Numenorean who currently holds the prestigious position of head torturer at Barad-dûr, and personifies Sauron's viciousness – possibly quite literally, because it looks like half his face was yanked off at some point.

• ՆՃԷ ԲԱՔԼՑՈՒ ՄԿԷԸ •



Déjà vu? The team at Monolith is consulting with Peter Jackson and Weta Workshop – the people behind *The Lord of the Rings* movies – to make sure that the setting, characters, and everything else work in the context of existing media, up to and including the Orcs' English accents.

• ԻՃԻԿ ԻԿ ՈՒ ԲԱՎԿԱԾՈՒ •

THE CHOICES OF MASTER TALION

During an encounter, Talion can choose to dominate an enemy rather than kill them – introducing some of the game's more... intriguing strategic options. A dominated Orc may, for example, be commanded to go on and get back to work as usual, but as your covert operative, Back in the Nemesis system then, the Orc will complete his own missions and even continue to be promoted up the ranks, and later murder another Orc on your orders. A dominated Orc can also threaten a Warchief, boosting his defences but also boosting the loot you'll get for killing him.

Talion can also dominate Caragors, the Warg-like beasts that roam around Mordor, and force them to fight for him or even ride them. Once mounted, a Caragor can knock enemies to the ground and savage them for an instant kill – a manoeuvre I discovered with something resembling ecstatic psychosis (or is that psychotic ecstasy?) during my hands-on session at Gamescom. The booth handler probably still wakes up screaming.

• ԻՃԻԿ ԲԱՎԿԱԾՈՒ ՆՄԻԿ •



There are three ranks in the Orc army – from the bottom up, it's Grunt, Captain, and Warchief – and, with a vengeful Wraith-man-thing on the loose, there are loads of opportunities for promotion. By killing Talion, for example, a Grunt can be promoted to Captain. Wait, what?

"Traditionally, death in a game means

Once promoted to Captain, an Orc is also assigned a series of special character traits, including strengths, weaknesses, weapon modifiers, and combat moves. These traits are randomly determined by the Nemesis system, and no two Orcs are quite the same. One Captain, for example, may be impervious to stealth attacks and wield a flaming sword, but also clumsy and terrified of wild Caragors. Another Captain will be totally different.

But no Orc will ever forget Talion while he still lives, and an Orc who feels especially humiliated by a defeat at Talion's hands might even get a bit personal about it later.



• ՌԻԿ Ի Ն ԲԱՐԿԱԾՆ •

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST

Shadow of Mordor features an entirely original story written for the game, but some faces already familiar from the books will turn up here and there. Although Monolith isn't revealing the full list of names just yet, we do know that Gollum is in it, and not just by some crazy coincidence.

"Gollum plays a really important role in our story, in some ways a similar role to that he's going to play with Sam and Frodo 80 years later, when they're travelling into Mordor," said De Pater. "Celebrimbor, like Frodo, has this epic burden – he's trying to resist the corruption of power and of the rings. And Talion, like Sam, is someone who's sucked into these events beyond his control and would far rather he'd avoided them altogether. Gollum plays off the tension between our two main characters."

• ՆՃԻՔ ԲԱՐԿԱԾՆԻ ԿՄԷՆ •

“[The Nemesis system] really lets you create these stories within the world,” De Pater added. “Every single enemy in the world can gain experience and level up, and become a boss. And they have memories. So every time they meet you, they’ll remember that and speak to it in future encounters. We’ve got thousands upon thousands upon thousands of voice lines for that.”

Captains can become bodyguards for Warchiefs, and a Captain who has been dominated by Talion can be used to divulge information about that Warchief's traits (and then used against him) and provoke a Warchief into open combat. In turn, vanquishing a Warchief can earn Talion a Rune that adds bonuses to his weapons. By exploiting a Warchief's specific vulnerabilities – attacking a Warchief with a weakness to stealth attacks with a stealth attack, for example – Talion is more likely to get a Rune that adds some sort of stealth bonus. Even in the midst of all this chaos, some order – or, at least, a predictable consistency – still remains.

And hope. As the old Gaffer said, "Where there is life, there is hope," and, you know, Talion isn't dead. Not *exactly*.

Interview with Monolith productions



NAG: *Shadow of Mordor's* narrative is something completely separate to previous *The Lord of the Rings* games, which have mostly involved characters and conflicts already familiar from the books and films. How did it all come together?

Monolith: One of the things that really inspired us about both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is that they involve some shared characters like Gollum and Gandalf, but mostly they are standalone stories that work by themselves. It really doesn't matter what order you read them in as they are wonderful, and they both add to each other. We tried to follow that example and create a story that works by itself but which can be enjoyed as following on from *The Hobbit* and learning the fate of the Necromancer or as a precursor to *The Lord of the Rings* and showing more of the Dark Lord, the origins of the Rings of Power and the build up towards the War of the Ring.

NAG: Until now, Wraiths in *The Lord of the Rings* – and ghostly entities of any sort in most games, really – have almost exclusively been the bad guys. How do

you manage that kind of expectation with the introduction of a Wraith protagonist?

Monolith: Some of the inspirations were the Army of the Dead, who were bound by an ancient oath and ended up being the key to the victory over the armies of Mordor at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. And also the idea that the Nazgûl themselves did not all start out as evil, but they became evil as they were corrupted by the power of the Nine Rings, which Celebrimbor himself helped to forge. So there are definitely two sides to Celebrimbor and Talion, like Frodo, Boromir, Saruman, and others they are battling against the corruption of power.

NAG: How much of the story content is canon, and how much is creative licence?

Monolith: The story takes place within the canon of Middle-earth and we worked very closely with Middle-earth Enterprises to ensure the authenticity of the lore, but the details of the story and some of the characters including Talion are original. The Middle-earth universe is such a rich world that it's very inspiring to be able to set an original story within it at the same

time as connecting it to *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the deeper history and lore of Middle-earth.

NAG: Despite featuring an original story, there must be some risk of putting off potential players who might not have read the books or seen the films.

How accessible is *Shadow of Mordor* to somebody like that?

Monolith: It was very important to us that *Shadow of Mordor* works as a standalone story with no prior reference required. If you've never seen the movies, if you've just seen *The Hobbit*, or if you've read all of the books taking place in Middle-earth, we want you to be able to enjoy *Shadow of Mordor*. Of course if you haven't read the books or seen the films and you enjoy *Shadow of Mordor*, we hope you'll pick them up because they are amazing.

NAG: In terms of development and design, the Nemesis system is so much more complicated than just an iterated hit-list of Orc thugs for the player to maim and murder. Can you tell us a bit more about how it actually works, behind the scenes?

Monolith: It's tricky to give a short answer because there's a lot going on under the hood to make it work, from AI to numerous systems tracking multiple interactions and events. I think what we're most pleased about is that all of this complication is invisible when players pick up the controller. A very consistent reaction of people who play has been that it just feels natural and intuitive and brings the world to life in a new and memorable way. **NAG**

- Azimuth



Reviews *Intro*

When life gives you lemons, you're supposed to make lemonade. But what if life gives you a pile of games journalists? Are we supposed to make gamesjournalade? How much sugar should we add in? Do we peel them first? Meet your reviewers...

Question / Invent an in-app purchase for an existing game. What does it do and how much does it cost?



DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES

StarCraft II, obviously. Worker units mine resources at a horribly slowed pace, and the only way to increase their mining speed is to buy Motivation Points. Each MP buys you an hour of "fast" mining. R10 per Motivation Point.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Risen 3: Titan Lords, *Luftrausers*, *To the Moon*



DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI

The ability to turn *Candy Crush Saga* into a violent and profane open-world, sandbox survival JRPG-FPS hybrid with zombies, Nazis, Pokémon and Sims. Going for R200.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

A Game with a Kitty 7: Sky Crashers



GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS

Batteries for a flashlight in *Resident Evil* or any other horror game. They last 20 minutes and cost \$5 a pop.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

COD: Zombies, *Sims 4*, and *Destiny* as soon as deadline is over



MATT "SAND_STORM" FICK

A button that enforces age-restrictions in multiplayer games by releasing coyotes at the offender. Cost: \$1, so that it gets used often on those squeaky-voiced *****!

CURRENTLY PLAYING

The Witcher 2, *Hoard* and *Pokémon Pearl*

▶ *mini review*

Monument Valley (mobile)

Much like how Morpheus taught Neo to question his perceptions in *The Matrix*, so developers are constantly creating games that bestow upon players the same task. Perhaps one of the seminal examples is the charming, arty puzzle romp that is *Monument Valley*.

The game casts players in the role of a mysterious princess named Ida. It is her task to navigate through a series of rooms, buildings and landscapes where the geometry is inconsistent and vanishing points simply don't exist. To put it in blunt terms, it's what a game by M.C. Escher would have looked like; indeed, the use of double-imagery and overlapping shapes harken back to the artist's eye-catching paintings.

To complete each level, players must ensure that a clear path exists

between Ida and the exit; if not, her feet stay firmly planted in the ground. Making Ida move will entail moving and rotating the pathways, bypassing obstacles, keeping an eye out for strange crow-like beings and remaining mindful of optical illusions.

It's an engrossing title where taking in the sights is as interesting as solving the puzzles themselves. The only drawback is that everything is too easy and the game is over entirely too soon. Still, it's a short-yet-satisfying experience and another excellent showcase of games as a form of art. Get it! **NAG**

- Delano



90

A playable work of art whose style will totally suck you in, even though only briefly.

HEARD AT THE OFFICE...

“Shammalammaammoformygun!!” *

-Michael

* “Goodness, it appears that I have no more ammunition for my firearm.”



MICHAEL “RETTIDE” JAMES

My in-app purchase will make Geoff stop asking me to send this bit of text in this month because I can't think of anything. \$9.99.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Destiny



MIKLOS “MIKIT0707” SZECSEI

A button in *Diablo III* to buy more mouse clicks. Attacking is gated behind bundled packages of mouse clicks. Rift Guardians can sometimes drop click tokens. 99c for 10 clicks; R8.99 for 100 clicks; R1,000 for Legendary Gloves of Infinite Clicking.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Destiny



MIKTAR “MIKTAR” DRACON

A function to remove other players from your perception of the universe. Lets you select a single user of an online service, and never see their player character, profile, messages to or from, or about them, again. Cost: \$10 / R100.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Guild Wars 2, The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing II, Warframe, Marvel Heroes 2015, Destiny



NEO “SHOCKG” SIBEKO

An app that keeps reminding you how meaningless in-app purchases are using all kinds of different analogies. \$10

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Nothing at all.



TARRYN “AZIMUTH”

VAN DER BYL

It's a console self-destruct app for *Destiny* because I'm on deadline and I have zero impulse control. It costs nothing because I love free stuff and I have zero impulse control.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Destiny. No, wait. I'm not playing games, Geoff, pinky swear.

▶ mini review

Spirits (mobile)

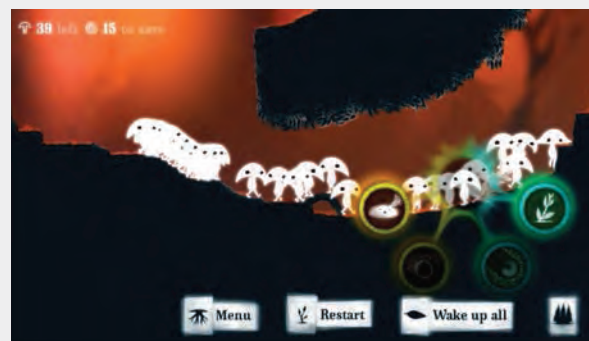
no point in beating around the bush: *Spirits* is, at its most fundamental, a *Lemmings* clone. The concept will be instantly recognisable to fans of the suicidal rodents; players guide a prerequisite number of creatures (in this case, spirits of autumn) over a short obstacle course, whilst imbuing any number of said creatures with special abilities that will aid their comrades in reaching the exit. For example, you may sacrifice a spirit to turn it into a gust of wind to blow others across a chasm. Figuring out which powers to employ and finding the most rewarding path to the level's end is the meat of the experience.

Though it may not be anything you've not heard of previously, *Spirits* is a soothing, accessible title that's as much a piece of art as

it is a game. The graphics invoke the feeling of illustrations that have come to life, complete with wiggly movements and an overall hand-drawn aesthetic. The colour schemes are extremely relaxing, with their assorted warm glows and bloom effects, whilst the simplistic ambient music complements the Zen-like visuals.

Despite some unpredictable physics, the whole affair is never frustrating. If you want a beautiful game that will relax you while it gets the brain juices flowing, you need to download it immediately (or at least try out the demo). **NAG**

- Delano



86

While not flawless, it's still a beautiful and artistic spiritual successor to *Lemmings*, pun intended.

PLATFORMS / 360 / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Bungie

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 12 players

PUBLISHER / Activision

WEBSITE / www.destinythegame.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom



Destiny

Guardians of the galaxy

We were out and about somewhere on Venus, and my buddy Julio asked if I'd already found the Golden Chest in that location. "It's just over here, on a ledge under us," he told me. I stepped to the edge of the cliff and looked over. "Where? I don't see it," I said.

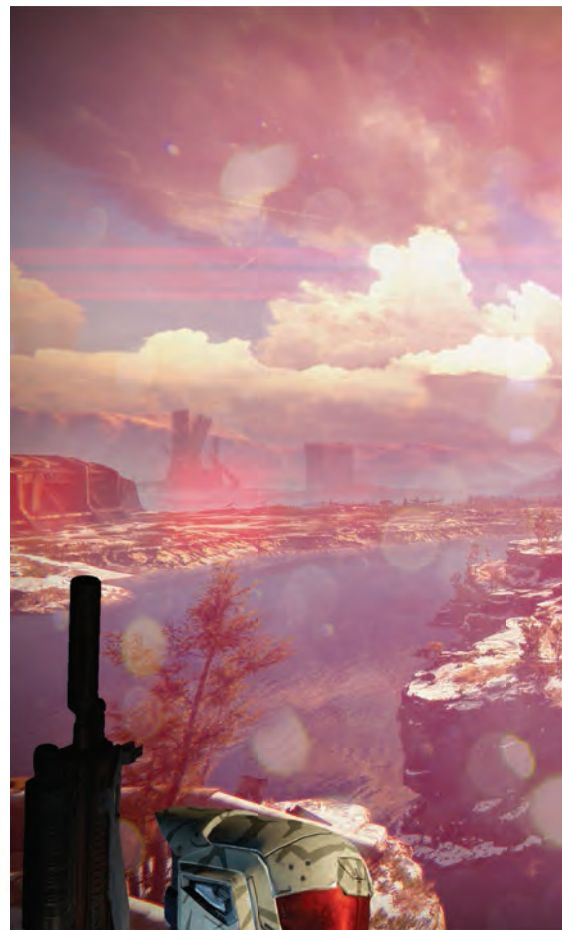
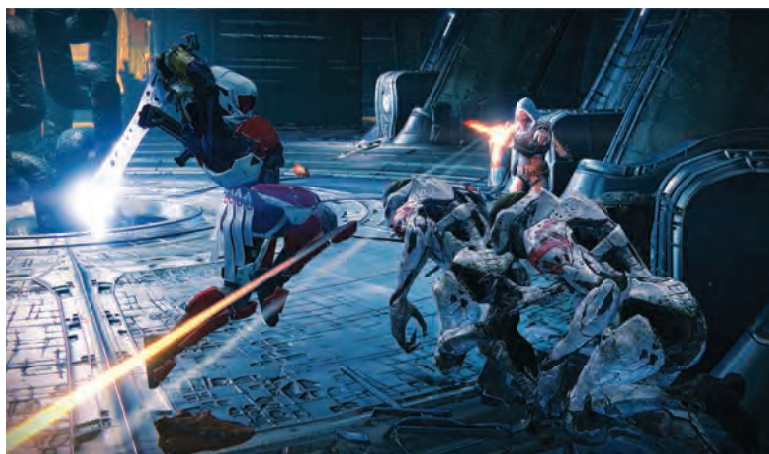
That's when he jumped onto his hoverbike and pushed me to my death. Classic Julio.

Destiny is a lot of things – some good, some not so good – but, ultimately, it's what you make of it. And more than this one thing or that other thing, I'm having loads of fun playing space cowboys with my friends. For me, that's probably the most important thing about a multiplayer game. For others, maybe not so much. This is one of those games that you'll love or hate depending entirely on what matters to you.

It also took me, like, two hours to write and delete and rewrite the previous paragraph,

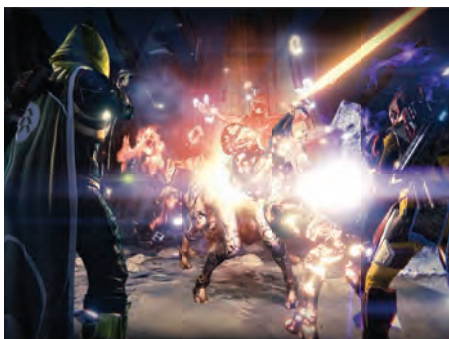
and it still reads like one of those vapid quotes you'd print in an inappropriately curly font over a black and white photo of a beach, erroneously attribute to some dead person, and post on Facebook. SO LET'S GET ON WITH IT.

Okay, the not so good things first. The story is an unmitigated disaster. It starts incoherently, ends abruptly, and I'm not sure I could explain what happened during the six hours or so in between. Something about... aliens. I'd expected something a bit more compelling than "... aliens" from the team that bought us the *Halo* series, although when I put it like that, I suppose the *Halo* series is basically "... aliens" too, but without all the ad-libbed techno-metaphysical burble substituted for a plot. It's a game where you shoot stuff for points, not an allegorical exposition of submaterialist deconstructivism (or whatever is going on here).





Don't eat the yellow snow!



REDTIDE'S OPINION

The hype machine behind *Destiny* was utterly convincing. Before opening the box I was expecting some kind of mythical blending of *Halo* and *Star Wars* and everything in-between. Living up to expectations like this is just impossible but *Destiny* has surprised by getting pretty damn close.

That said, the game has a fair shake of problems. The story and single player experience is ropey at best, you often don't know why you're fighting what and new concepts, aliens and lore are introduced assuming you're supposed to know what's going on and how it all fits together. It feels like the developers are setting up this great framework for all the future content, expansions and DLC but forgot to include enough in the initial release to make sense. I'm sure somewhere along the line it'll all fit together, but just not right now. This would ordinarily be a big negative but somehow the game's charming delivery of fighting bad guys, storytelling, setting and sheer technical awesomeness hide it very well – you just don't care because you're having such a good time.

The game world is beautiful to look at and interesting to play in. There's so much detail all over the place that it feels overwhelming – like you'll never get to see it all. Exotic plant life flourishes on Venus, Mars looks amazing and the moon is full of swarming aliens that keep you on your toes. The only let-down here is base camp: it's all a bit spread out and feels padded, you can't help thinking that a single location with all the vendors would have been better than this spreading out of characters that sell you weapons and armour. Having a ship is also a little pointless and really only serves as an elaborate loading screen to get between missions and in some cases to show your progress in the game. Again a minor quibble because when you do get to the fighting bits the game shines. Battling the very smart enemy feels satisfying and the blend of fantasy and science fiction works well. Sometimes you're fighting metal monsters and sometimes a handful of grunts that rush in and kill you. It's fresh and Bungie certainly knows how to put on a good fight, leaving the player feeling effective and powerful. *Destiny* currently provides a decent framework for a great future game; it's certainly worth the investment now because it's only going to get better. You also think

about it when you're not playing it, it calls out for more attention and that always a good thing.

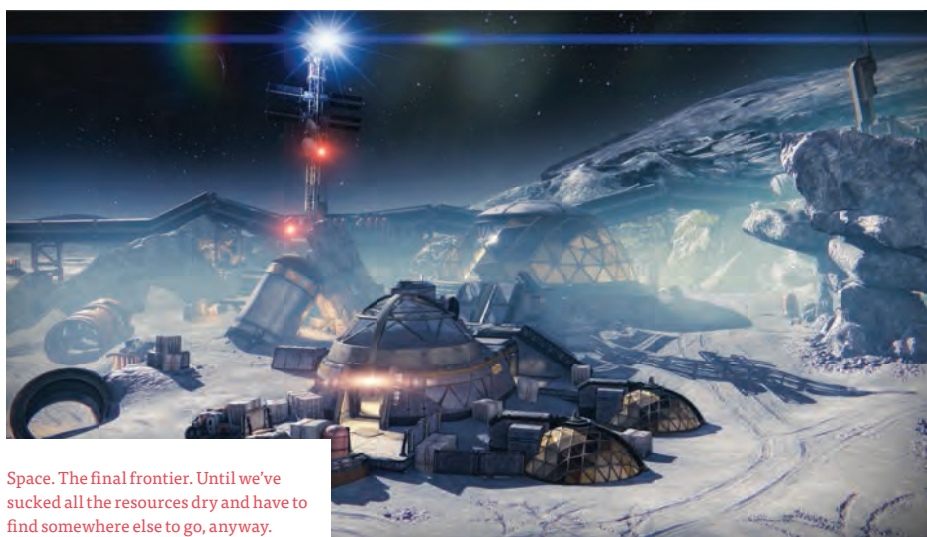
76

On a more practical level, limiting the co-op campaign and optional Strike missions to a maximum of three players in a Fireteam was, I think, an exceedingly questionable decision. I'm sure Bungie has some heuristic data backing it up, but for those of us who play games socially – and I'd argue that *Destiny* is, fundamentally, a social game – the option to add additional players to the party, and scale the game's difficulty to that instead simply makes more sense. At the time of writing this – just over a week since launch – the new six-player Raid mode has only just arrived, but the inexorable march of time and print deadlines means I won't have a chance to try it out before this review is due.

In fact, I get the impression that there's a whole lot of things I won't have a chance to try out before this review is due, but mostly because they're not even in the game yet. Although it's not quite an MMO (Bungie prefers the marketing blurb "shared world

shooter"), *Destiny* resembles one near enough that we should expect a substantial supply of updates and new content over the next months, and even years. For now, although there's plenty to see and do, the game world – perhaps "universe" is a better description – is so massive that it all feels a bit empty, like something is missing. Which hardly seems a justifiable criticism when I've already clocked over 20 hours exploring it, but it is what it is.

Now, the good things. The gameplay is absolutely outstanding. Not altogether surprisingly, *Destiny* plays a lot of *Halo* – the enemies, in particular, demonstrate comparatively devious AI – and even the most insignificant flashpoint firefight can quickly turn into a dramatic spectacle of consummate brutality, especially once you've unlocked the more exotic sub-classes. Once I'd swapped to the Hunter's Bladedancer sub-class, for example, I could use my charged-up Super Ability to unleash a series of devastating



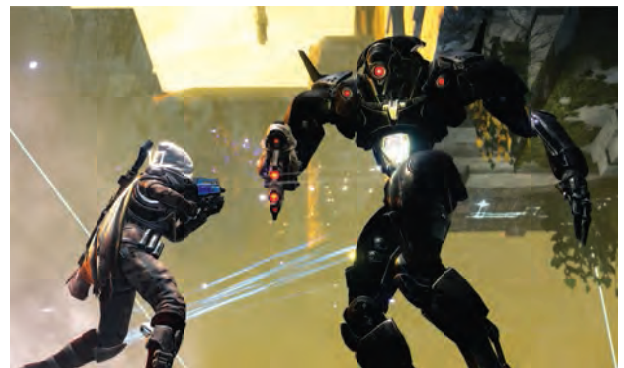
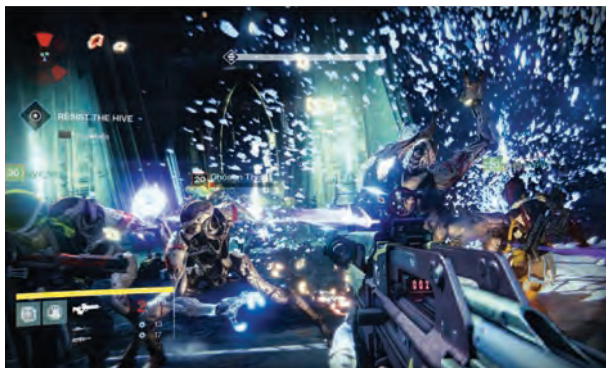
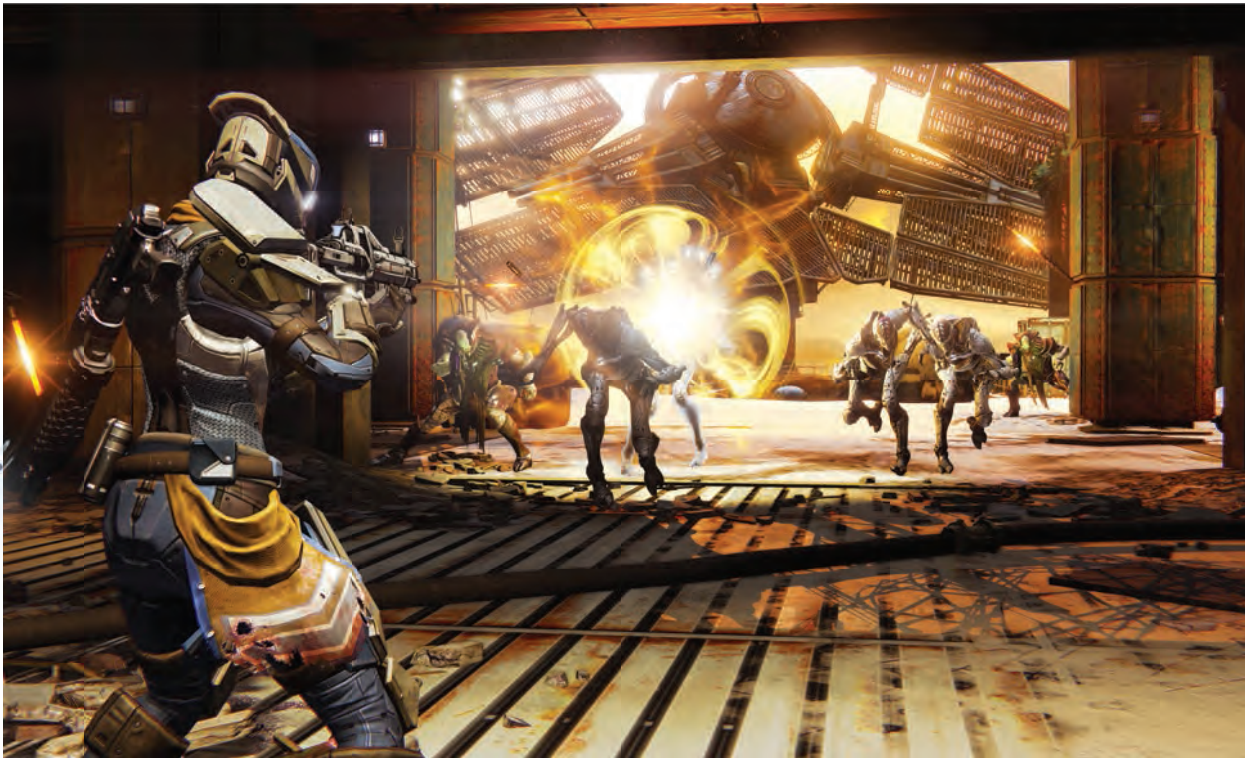
Space. The final frontier. Until we've sucked all the resources dry and have to find somewhere else to go, anyway.



MIKTAR'S OPINION

It's too damn early to review *Destiny*. Seriously, I'd be wary of any reviews that pass down a verdict from on high, calling in judgement, and making a statement about what *Destiny* is or is not. It's going to take time for the game to shake out. Like the launch of any MMO, there are people upset that *Destiny* is not what they thought it would be. There's a lot of weird misinformation and misrepresentation still clogging up the signal, which creates bad presumptions that can skew a person's experience. To top it all off, like any MMO, the entire game isn't there yet. At the time of writing, the first raid had yet to unlock, which represents a large chunk of what makes *Destiny* the weird quasi-MMO/FPS/RPG hybrid it's trying to be.

Ignoring all else, this much is true: Bungie can make a shooter that looks good, plays great and feels amazing to engage with. Your mileage with the story will vary, and there's insane amounts of lore for the lore junkies. When you team up with friends to take on Strikes (the game's version of dungeons), part of what *Destiny* truly is starts to reveal itself. This isn't a game you buy to finish in a day and then shelf. It's a hobby.



melee strikes that, even hours later, hasn't lost its thrill. Even in the middle of a mission, I'll still hop off my hoverbike and pick a fight with the random creeps just for the hell of it.

They'll pick fights with you too – sometimes, if you're in the right place at the right time, you'll get to take part in one of the game's public events. These are spontaneously spawned co-op missions that anybody in the area can join, and work together with other players and Fireteams to complete an objective before the timer ticks out for extra XP and loot. I've played in five or six of these, and they're super cool – it's not just one more thing to shoot, but also an opportunity to feel like you're legitimately part of something on a much grander scale. The same grander scale that's conspicuously (and inexplicably) undeveloped elsewhere in a game that sold itself on the promise to "become legend".

Where the story failed to deliver a meaningful reason to kill the bad guys, the Strike missions make up for it with overwhelming aggression. It's fight or die, and you'll probably die anyway. Each planet in *Destiny* includes at least one replayable Strike

mission (and a randomised playlist is unlocked at level 18, with multiple difficulty tiers for subsequent levels), featuring a structured sequence of objectives, and a big boss battle at the end. For my cash, this is the game's real prize – every Strike mission is deliriously chaotic, unrelentingly hard, and stupidly exciting. Here, you can dispense with any incomprehensible pretensions of saving the world, and just kill for killing's sake. **NAG**

- Azimuth

78 *Some of this, some of that, but not quite everything we might've expected. And yet, it's almost impossible to stop playing. Destiny was never going to live up to its extravagant hype, but it's close enough to matter.*

PLUS / Challenging gameplay / Amazing visuals / FUN

MINUS / Terrible story / Co-op player limit

PLATFORMS / PC

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Life simulation

DEVELOPER / EA Maxis / The Sims Studio

AGE RATING / 12

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

PUBLISHER / Electronic Arts

WEBSITE / www.thesims.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Prima Interactive

The Sims 4

One small step backwards for Simkind

The Sims is one of those series that's had the misfortune to fall into a predictable pattern: release a core game, fluff it up with expansion packs, build a massive community, and then tear it all down at start again. This is the fourth time we've seen this cycle begin and, just like every time it happens, there's widespread comparisons between where the previous title ended up and where the new one kicks off. But it's important to compare the core titles to keep things fair, only, when you do this, it only accentuates this new title's shortcomings.

To give you some perspective I'll quote a line from my 2009 review of *The Sims 3*: "...spend a few days with *The Sims 3* and you'll discover just how shallow those titles before it were." The same simply can't be said for *The Sims 4*. In fact, I'd argue that after a few days with this one, you'll be yearning for one or two of those fantastic features like neighbourhood customisation, Create-A-Style, and seamless lot transitions.

To make up for its missing features (the above-mentioned, as well as toddlers, swimming pools, terrain deformation, and a few others), the focus of gameplay in *The Sims 4* is slanted towards the individual Sims

themselves and slightly away from the idea that you're designing and playing in a living, dynamic and connected world. Maxis clearly wants the builders in the *SimCity* corner, and the gabbers here with *The Sims*.

IF YOU BUILD IT...

Let's look at some of the design tools on offer. For starters, there's some great stuff like rounded corner fences, foundations and counters, but not full-size walls. Building, adjusting and moving entire rooms is very easy, and neat features like optional off-grid placement and what is now well-matured support for eight-directional placement of structures and objects. Your Sims also won't get too horribly stuck should you use lots of diagonals.

The tools for placing decorations and furniture don't seem to have changed much, but they're fine as they are, although there's no way to change the appearance of an object once it's been placed down. Here the lack of Create-A-Style is sorely obvious, and the textures/colours on offer don't exactly scream originality. In general, the selection of items is just on the stingy side of acceptable.



Neighbourhood customisation, and really the whole neighbourhood concept as a whole, is one of the weakest parts of *The Sims 4*. You can change public and residential lots to your heart's content, as well as import new ones from the online gallery of user-made lots, but there's no way to change the structure, layout, or appearance of the neighbourhoods. You're stuck with just two of them, each with 21 lots of fixed sizes. And if you want your Sims to visit another lot, you need to sit through a loading screen every time – even if you're just popping next door. Considering that you can get nearly everything you need for your Sims in your home lot, there's little reason to ever leave the house.

THERE'S LIFE IN HERE SOMEWHERE

While the building and customisation tools are a bit of a let-down, the attention that's been given to the Sims themselves is very impressive. Sim behaviour is dominated by moods and emotions – a concept born in *Sims 3* and taken to the next level here. Angry, flirty, embarrassed, confident, energised, bored, tense, and more – they turn your Sims from little computer people into believable entities that need someone to take care of them, or use those emotions for interesting purposes. When your Sim is in a particular mood, new interactions open up with objects and other Sims which are hilarious at first, and





The Sim creation process features impressive face and body adjustment tools, allowing you to get in there and push/pull individual features of your Sims until they look perfectly hideous.



Rooms can be automatically built and populated by selecting from either premade options or those imported from the online gallery. These rooms can be adjusted afterwards and all of its furniture will fall into place (most of the time).

cunningly deep once you get the hang of the system. Taking an angry poop or confidentially bragging to your neighbours could earn your Sims Aspiration Points; get enough of these and you can buy one-shot boosts or permanent bonuses for your Sims. It's very possible to groom a Sim into an angry thug or perfectly-centred hippie, and actually use that to their advantage, which is great for players who like to go off the beaten path of the socially acceptable.

Skills and careers have also had a bit of an overhaul. While some career paths have been given the sack, their replacements are generally more interesting and well suit the quirky nature of *The Sims*. The skills that you gain in the quest to improve your Sims' job standing or simple usefulness around the house often unlock access to new and interesting activities, and they almost always find their way into conversations (like discussing recipes, video game strategies or home DIY tips with like-minded Sims). These conversations are also dynamic in that they can take place with ever-changing groups of Sims in many settings: at the bar, in front of the TV or while two Sims are engaging in different activities near one another. Multitasking, when it works, is a treat.

The Sims 4 isn't afraid to make it known that it's the Sims who are the stars of this show. Not the buildings, not the furniture or the design elements, not the

neighbourhoods or even the neighbours. This is about your Sims, their stories and their interactions with the world (immediately) around them. In that sense I commend *The Sims 4* for what it is, and I'm sure there will be many people out there who love it for just that, but I can't help shake the feeling that there should be more at the heart of this game. Especially considering the excellent starting points its predecessors have had. **NAG**

- GeometriX

74 *The Sims 4 is a slight but clear step backwards for the series. Some of the Sim-centric stuff is really neat, but it's all at the expense of a living, believable world. The result is a game that deliberately sells itself short now for the obvious grab at paid-for content down the line, and maybe even a few bits that can't be fixed with DLC.*

PLUS / Deep Sim interactions / Solid skills system / Extensive Sim creation process

MINUS / Lacking customisation options / Neighbourhoods are nearly useless / Limited object and clothing options

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Beat-'em-up

DEVELOPER / Keen Games

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 4 players

PUBLISHER / Deep Silver

WEBSITE / sacred-world.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Apex Interactive

Sacred 3

Not quite what it says on the tin

the *Sacred* series has always been the black sheep of the action RPG family. *Sacred* and *Sacred 2* were pretty generic as far as the genre goes, visibly lacking in the meticulous design ideals that underpin the likes of *Diablo* and *Titan Quest*. Despite its failings, *Sacred* gathered a substantial following, mostly thanks to its enormous game worlds full of quests to do and loot to pilfer, along with its wacky sense of humour and the inclusion of some unique ideas within its formula. Sadly, the games were also notorious for being completely broken. *Sacred 2* was such a hideously buggy mess at launch that it inevitably led to the shuttering of original developer Ascaron. Now we've got *Sacred 3*, under the banner of both a new developer and publisher. And it's broken in an entirely different way.

There's no sense in it even being called *Sacred*. Apart from the fact that it shares series lore, there's not much else tying this game to



The fixed camera is often obscured behind pieces of scenery, making it even more difficult to make out what's happening amidst the cluttered confusion of scuffles.



Loot is mostly limited to snatching up piles of gold, as well as orbs that increase your health and whatever the mana resource is called. Not exactly *Diablo*, is it?

its namesake. It's definitely not an action RPG; the bulk of the game involves fighting your way through self-contained levels made up of a series of tightly linear corridors, bashing at waves of enemies until you're allowed to continue to the next area. The core of what makes any action RPG worthy of hours of your time – a cunningly addictive loot system – is almost entirely non-existent, aside from the occasional canned weapon pickups, which you'll later discover are pretty much useless anyway because equipping your character with different weapons doesn't do much other than change his/her look.

Controlling your character is often painful. Using a combination of WASD movement controls, mouse buttons and number keys, you can unleash various combos, special attacks (called Combat Arts) and dodges while in combat. Your character generally does actions in the direction of your mouse cursor rather than the direction in which they're moving, which means you'll often fire off Combat Arts or attacks in entirely the wrong direction because there's a visual disconnect between where your mouse cursor is and which way you're actually facing. Once you get used to it, there's a modicum of fun to be had – but it's so woefully tedious that it's not long before you'll find yourself bored with the notion of continuing.

In between all of that is the endlessly sarcastic dialogue that constantly spews forth from various sources in the game. It's completely off-putting, with relentless

attempts at humour that almost entirely miss their mark – unless the mark is anywhere from mildly offensive to "maybe – maybe – I would've chuckled at that if I hadn't gotten tired of this rubbish several hours ago". The mission select menu that appears once you've endured yet another monotonous boss battle at the end of a level doubles as a character hub, letting you unlock new Combat Arts and buy various things with gold you've collected – but unlocks are hidden behind a layer of ill-explained obfuscation that makes upgrading your character seem like more of a chore than its worth. **NAG**

- Barkskin

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Sacred 3 is not Sacred. It's taken almost all of the action RPG mechanics of its predecessors and traded them in for a mindless, soulless brawl-a-thon – and I would be okay with that, if the game was actually any good. Instead, it's a hollow, repetitive experience that's founded on half-baked game design. What a pity.

PLUS / Looks nice enough / Chaotic action is occasionally fun

MINUS / Ridiculous design decisions / Annoying, incessant dialogue / Controls suck

PLATFORMS / PS3 / PS4 / PSV

REVIEWED ON / PS4

AGE RATING / 3

GENRE / Art game

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

WEBSITE / www.hohokum.playstation.com

DEVELOPER / Honeyslug / Sony Santa Monica

DISTRIBUTOR / PSN

PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment

Hohokum

Wow, such colourful

hohokum is weird. But it's a good kind of weird, if "good kind of weird" is a phrase you don't mind hearing when it comes to video games. You control a snake-like creature as it zips and spirals and twirls its way around myriad 2D levels. The goal is to locate your fellow snake-like buddies by fulfilling the often charming requirements of each area. Each of the requirements and levels are all unique, but gameplay doesn't ever deviate from flying around the level bumping into specific things. I realise that sounds vague – it's actually a tricky game to describe. There's no explanation or tutorial, which kind of adds to the whole "art" theme that pervades Hohokum's everything.

Hohokum is brightly coloured with bold splashes of vivid hues offset by

stark white backgrounds. There were moments when I could have quite happily paused the game and just hung my TV on the wall like a piece of contemporary graphic design. It's a gorgeous "game". Throw in some sublime music tracks by various electronic artists (Tycho's stuff is particularly incredible and hasn't left my playlist in weeks) and you've got something that doesn't often happen in this industry.

At times the game can feel overly self-indulgent. Some might be put off by the total lack of instructions, and until you figure out where the hub world starts and portals lead, you might feel overwhelmed and a little bit lost. The sheer creativity in the worlds and characters is what will keep you moving forward. **NAG**

- Mikito707



We can't really overstate how beautiful this game is. Sure, the strong art style won't appeal to everyone, but there's no denying it's colourful. We always did feel that gaming needed to be more colourful.

78

If playable, digital art is something that piques your interests, then I recommend Hohokum. If you're into contemporary graphic art and deeply synthesized music that weaves and adapts as you play, then you need to be all over this game. If you're a fan of the more conventional gaming experience, then avoid. Otherwise, dive in and soak up all the colours.

PLUS / Mesmerisingly beautiful game / Incredibly chilled-out music / Nothing quite like it

MINUS / Can get repetitive / OCD nightmare

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PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Role-playing game

DEVELOPER / Piranha Bytes

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

PUBLISHER / Deep Silver

WEBSITE / risen3.deepsilver.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Apex Interactive

Risen 3: Titan Lords

Keep digging. The treasure's got to be here somewhere.

Risen 2 was an impressively ambitious role-playing excursion, but one that proved too deeply flawed in too many ways for it to be easily recommended. *Risen 3: Titan Lords* shares its forebear's tendency towards punching well above its weight, but manages to string together a far more cohesive (but no less batty) adventure this time around. In it, you're once again the Nameless Hero, fumbling your way through a semi-coherent story involving crystal portals and Shadow Lords and half-dead protagonists and other assorted pirate-themed things. It's important to mention that, as with all of Piranha Bytes' RPGs, this is not a big-budget title, and from the outset it very clearly lacks the painstaking polish that goes into AAA games. But it's got heart, enough to make it compelling in spite of its more quirky character traits.

Anyone who's played the previous game will recognise many of the locations in its sequel, with a number of environments being reused and repurposed to keep them fresh.

There's a ton of space to explore, and early on you're handed control of a ship used for fast-travel between the different islands in *Risen 3*'s world. Each of those islands contains its own quest lines, characters and opportunities to earn yourself gold and gear. There's loads of distractions to keep yourself busy throughout your journey – although most of the game's quests are disappointingly of the “go here, fetch X, get Y reward”. Still, they encourage exploration, and there's almost always some useful treasure to be found if you go out of your way to find it.

There's a progression system in place that's similar to that of its predecessors. As you complete quests and defeat foes, you gain “Glory” – a resource that's exchanged to increase your proficiency in a variety of areas, like melee combat, conversational skills and lockpicking. Pump enough points into these attributes and you can visit trainers who'll teach you various abilities. Those abilities range from the option to gather crafting

Enemy variety isn't quite as diverse as I'd like, but each island you visit does change things up a bit where hostile fauna is concerned.



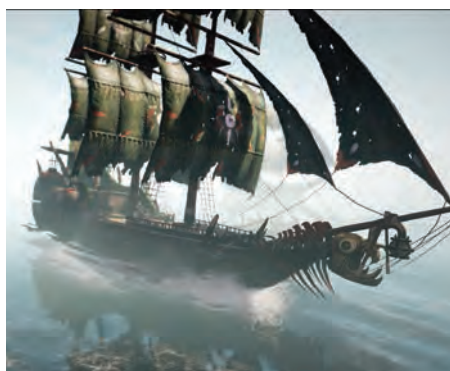
components from beasties you kill, to being able to train monkeys to steal for you. There's magic too, including some really peculiar stuff like a spell which transforms you into a parrot so you can reach otherwise unreachable places. Combat is still annoyingly clunky, with enemies always seeming to be just a fraction faster and more capable than you, but the presence of companion characters makes up for the difficulty this presents.

There's a sort of karma system in place whereby your character (who happens to not be alive, but not quite dead either) will gain and lose “Soul” depending on your actions. The game alludes to consequences surrounding this, but other than certain characters getting a bit upset with my chosen allegiance, I've yet to notice any real repercussions. Speaking of characters, despite the appearance of a few cringe-inducing stereotypes, many of the game's inhabitants manage to be quite endearing. **NAG**

- Barkskin



Yes, you can heal yourself with rum. Yes, this is (technically) something you can do in real life. No, we do not endorse it. OR DO WE?



72 Improving on *Risen 2* in many ways, *Risen 3* is an entertaining role-playing experience. It lacks the sort of polish that you'd find in big-budget RPGs like *Skyrim*, but it makes up for that with the sort of wild ambition that makes games like this endearing. If its rough exterior doesn't bother you, there's fun to be found here.

PLUS / Tons of stuff to do / Ambitiously bizarre / Solid RPG mechanics

MINUS / Buggy / Inner workings should be more transparent / Sloppy combat

PLATFORMS / PS3 / PSV	REVIEWED ON / PS3
AGE RATING / 12	GENRE / Action
MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 2 players	
WEBSITE / gundam-musou.jp	
DEVELOPER / Omega Force	PUBLISHER / Bandai Namco Games
DISTRIBUTOR / PSN	

Dynasty Warriors: Gundam Reborn

Angry boys with robot toys,
IN SPACE!

By the time a player finishes the six Official Timeline anime story modes in *Dynasty Warriors Gundam Reborn*, they will be a professional robot killer. While it's not clear what the "Reborn" part stands for, what is here cuts straight to the point: slice/shoot through an entire television series' worth of *Gundam* story – or mix and match in Ultimate mode – while wrecking tens of thousands of mobile suits.

Absolutely nothing is original, but it's put together with a lack of fluff that speaks to meat-and-potatoes gaming. Mobile suits enjoy crisp control with a good balance between melee combos and super attacks. On the downside, many pilots and suits are redundant – while other *Warriors* games have strived to eliminate clones, it seems that wasn't in the budget for *Reborn*. As well, battle objectives are sometimes confusing until you've played a map a couple of times. This may result in a mission fail when a critical NPC runs off to get themselves killed.

Even so the core gameplay loop is addictive with a ton of unlocks and much robot customisation to be had. While a fully satisfying amount of content is found in the base game, be advised that some of the most popular mobile suits in the *Gundam* meta-verse are found behind several DLC expansion mission packs.

NAG

-Miktar



Because robots explode, if you destroy any enemies that are flashing gold they'll blow up and chain-react, causing massive fratricide.

73 If you know nothing about the long-running robots-in-space series *Gundam*, this game acts as a quick primer by letting you play through abridged versions of the entire plot. Even for non-*Gundam* fans, there's a lot of well-designed content here at a budget price.

PLUS / Lots of content / Covers most of *Gundam* / Varied missions

MINUS / No English dub / Slightly bland visuals

PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC
GENRE / Action / sports	AGE RATING / 12
MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 players Online > 4 players	
WEBSITE / lethalleague.reptile-games.com	
DEVELOPER / Team Reptile	PUBLISHER / Team Reptile
DISTRIBUTOR / Steam	

Lethal League

The most intense
ballplay available

What a surprise! *Lethal League* knocks it out of the park, without even trying. The mechanics to this fighter are straightforward and very easy to understand. Two to four characters hit a baseball around an arena, trying to hit the other players with it. If a player hits the ball back, the speed of the ball increases. You can "bunt" the ball, temporarily knocking it straight up, but once it's hit again or touches the ground it will resume its previous velocity. If a player manages to hit the ball four times, they can do a special move that varies by character.

It sounds simplistic on paper, but the ball velocity gets so high that your only view of it is as a straight line bisecting the arena. Timing is critical, strategy vital, and seat-of-your-pants tactics (wild panic works too) all combine into a high-octane fight unlike anything I've seen before. In a very strange, oblique way, it reminds me of high-level play in Rockstar's *Table Tennis*. *Lethal League* has even replaced *Soul Calibur* as my favourite fighting game.

If you're curious about the game, you can play the original prototype of *Lethal League* here: lethalleague.reptile-games.com/prototype/ – it's not quite the same as the full game, but it's enough to give you a good impression.

NAG

-Ratkim



Each fighter has its own kind of special move, like hitting the ball through walls or making it travel in odd arcs.

85 You've never seen a fighting game like this (although it does bring back memories of the classic *Windjammers*). Part fighter, part sports game. It's crazy at high speed, yet remarkably tactical.

PLUS / Pumping music / Amazing combat / Great netcode

MINUS / Light on content

PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC
AGE RATING / 12	GENRE / Massively multiplayer / action
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > Yes	
WEBSITE / marvelheroes.com	
PUBLISHER / Gazillion Entertainment	DISTRIBUTOR / Steam
DEVELOPER / Gazillion Entertainment / Secret Identity Studios	

Marvel Heroes 2015

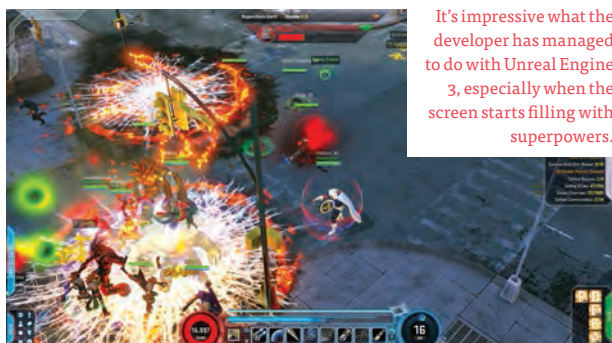
Feel like a superhero for free

With a huge roster of Marvel superheroes – and after some serious game-improving patches over the last year – this is a *Diablo*-like that fans of the genre wouldn't want to miss. You pick from a decent handful of starter heroes, like Punisher, Black Widow, Captain America, Colossus or Storm, then go about fighting through a nine-chapter campaign either by yourself or with friends. If you've ever played *Diablo*, *Torchlight* or other games in the genre, this is exactly like that except a bit more bombastic. Overpowered doesn't even begin to describe how it all feels, but it fits the topic well.

As you play, an in-game currency drops with regularity which can be used to unlock additional heroes. Or, if you're impatient, you can buy more heroes with real money. But I'd recommend just saving up the in-game currency for the hero you want, it doesn't take that long. Once you finish the campaign, you can replay it on increasing difficulty levels for better drops, or hit up a variety of end-game content types like horde-style missions. There's even high-level raids, but those require max-level characters and a firm understanding of how to play.

Before the "2015" patch, I was hesitant to recommend *Marvel Heroes* to anyone. But to Gazillion's credit, they've overhauled the game dramatically, and now it's a must-play in my book. **NAG**

-Miktario



It's impressive what the developer has managed to do with Unreal Engine 3, especially when the screen starts filling with superpowers.

83

If you love being insanely overpowered right from the start, *Marvel Heroes* has you covered. Playing as characters like Hulk, Deadpool, Rogue and others, it's amazing just how much impact the game lets you have even at low levels. While the combat might not feel as polished as *Diablo III* or as deep as *Path of Exile*, it does make you feel super.

PLUS / Ample content / Very fair F2P model / Potent heroes

MINUS / System intensive / Bit grindy

PLATFORMS / 3DS	REVIEWED ON / 3DS
GENRE / Tactical role-playing game	AGE RATING / 12
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None	
WEBSITE / www.projectxzone.eu	
DEVELOPER / Banpresto / Monolith Soft	PUBLISHER / Bandai Namco Games
DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom	

Project X Zone

An incomprehensible fanfiction brought to life

This is a sequel to *Namco X Capcom*, which was never released outside Japan. So the plot – already borderline insanity with characters from *Street Fighter*, *Mega Man*, *Sakura Wars*, *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken*, *Devil May Cry* and more all coming together – makes even less sense because we never got to see how it started.

Playing out across grid-based battlefields connected via plot exposition, you move teams of characters around and engage enemies. Once an actual fight starts, you chain together a limited amount of attacks, juggling the enemy and trying to land hits in a sweet spot for critical hits. If you're standing next to ally units, you can call them in mid-attack for even more damage.

The combat gets repetitive fast, and there's no real depth to anything you do, but the plot is cheesy enough to keep things interesting. It all looks great, from the battle animations to the hand-drawn cut-scenes when you pull off super attacks, but it never feels substantial. If you're totally a fan of all things Capcom and Namco, then *Project X Zone* is a decent diversion, provided you don't mind the turn-based nature of battles.

It might have served Bandai Namco better if they had ported and bundled the first game with this one, to give people context. **NAG**

-Melkert



Missions are turn-based, with units moving in a specific order based on their stats.

69

A strange mash-up of characters from almost every Namco and Capcom game ever made, *Project X Zone* is a so-so tactics game with very little depth, or meat on its bones. It's not a bad game, being well made with lots of impressive animation, it's just very, very specific in what it is.

PLUS / Humorous / Fan service

MINUS / Shallow / Fan service

PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC
AGE RATING / 12	GENRE / Action
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None	
WEBSITE / www.silverdollargames.com/ofdp.html	
DEVELOPER / Silver Dollar Games	PUBLISHER / Silver Dollar Games
DISTRIBUTOR / Steam	



One Finger Death Punch

Your two fingers have never felt more powerful

If you remember those flash-based animations from the Internet's yesteryears (like *XiaoXiao*), then *One Finger Death Punch* will look immediately familiar. You control a stick figure martial arts master, fighting an onslaught of enemies that appear from the sides of the screen. You only use two buttons, left and right mouse buttons, to attack enemies on the left and right of your character. It sounds simple, but *One Finger Death Punch* masterfully layers increasingly complex situations until eventually you either die like a punk or stand tall as a totally badass kung fu master.

With great visual feedback for each hit, a variety of weapons that you can turn against their wielders, and just straight-up solid-feeling gameplay, this is one of those little games you just can't put down. When in the middle of a fight, chaining together combos and not even seeing the colour-coded hints on which buttons to press, there's a great zen-like moment where you're just... rocking. The game might not look all that great from a distance (or even up close), and people might disregard it as cheap, but they'd be passing up something unique that practically anyone can play. Although the cartoon violence might not be suitable for really young kids. **NAG**

- Maklar



81

It's not much to look at, but *One Finger Death Punch* is a joy to play. It's fluid, responsive and jammed full of content. You can fire it up, fight a few rounds, then put it down until the urge hits again. Game acts as a good way to reboot your brain if you've got too much on your mind.

PLUS / Exciting / Lots of content / Cheap

MINUS / Looks cheap

PLATFORMS / PS3 / PS4 / PSV / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PS4
GENRE / Action	AGE RATING / 12
MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 2 players	
WEBSITE / www.gamecity.ne.jp/orochi2/ultimate	
DEVELOPER / Omega Force	PUBLISHER / Tecmo Koei
DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment	

Warriors Orochi 3 Ultimate

Be the man on a battlefield of many men

The most confusing thing about *Warriors Orochi 3 Ultimate* is at first wondering if you're supposed to know most of its 150 strong playable cast. Characters from Japanese and Chinese history freely intermingle as if they're old friends sharing a joke you're left out of. Then you realise it doesn't matter, there's only one plot here: collect as many warriors as you can, pump them full of experience, and go rip up the army of the great serpent, Orochi.

Here the game has it down. Pick any three unlocked characters for a real-time tag team, and travel through time (for real) to countless battle sites to tear apart thousands of demon possessed soldiers. Every victory grows your army and gains materials for crafting weapons and accessories. *WO3U* does an exceptional job of making the player feel like the hero of the battlefield.

Besides its lengthy campaign and free battle mode, *Ultimate* boasts the addition of the Gauntlet, an initially confusing fight through randomly generated dungeons with a five man team to grind rare materials. Less interesting is the anaemic Duel mode, which tries to make a one-on-one fighting game out of an engine which hates the very notion. Ignore it.

One bum game mode aside, it's hard not to say *Warriors Orochi* is the best there is at what it does. **NAG**

- Meektar



75

Combining the best elements from the *Dynasty Warriors* and *Samurai Warriors* series, this *Ultimate* edition smooths out any remaining wrinkles and adds in some guest characters. As far as games in this genre go, *Orochi 3* is top dog. At least until *Hyrule Warriors* comes out.

PLUS / So much content / Good campaign / Varied music

MINUS / Framerate wobbles / Punishing



HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

PC Upgrade RPG – a poor game! So I finally decided to upgrade my work PC. I also happened to have been playing *Skyrim* on the off chance that I had five minutes of breathing room between all the deadlines and obligations. Two years after this game came out, it dawned on me just how much of a massive fetch quest it is. I don't like it any less, but between this realisation and watching the huge *The Witcher 3* half hour video, my enthusiasm for the game subsided despite all twelve to fifteen mods I had added to the game including the DLC.

So the time had come for me to upgrade my ageing Z77 based machine. I mistakenly thought this would be a very quick process as the only components I needed from the older PC were my hard drives. Little did I know that needing anything from an older PC would turn into a series of side quests. All this was because I didn't want to install Windows again as this is my work machine. It has a profile that I use for games and it's not delicately put together or anything of the sort, but I can't afford the downtime. Installing all the software and getting up and ready again is always a 24-hour process, much longer than it takes to just build the PC.

Thus I figured, there are some differences in the systems in going from a Z77 to a Z97, but given that the platform technology did not change dramatically, this wouldn't be a problem. Well, I was wrong. Very wrong, because Windows would not recognize my USB mouse or keyboard, in fact it would not recognize any of my USB ports. Normally this would not be an issue as one could use a PS2 keyboard and mouse. I so happen to have a PS2 keyboard, but the real kicker here is that I don't have an optical drive. I haven't had one in over two years as I've not needed it since gaining access to fairly respectable VDSL speeds. So here I am; the drivers that I need for USB functionality are on a DVD. I can't go online because, guess what? The previous NIC was an Intel unit but a different one so my system does not have those drivers. The chosen motherboard (Z97 Gaming G1 Black Edition) does have two gigabit Ethernet ports, but the Killer E22XX chip it uses cannot use drivers that I had on one of my hard drives from earlier versions of this chip.

So what about tethering my phone to the system then going online that way? Nope this wouldn't work because I would need to do this via USB as well. Bluetooth could work but once again, I don't have the specific Bluetooth drivers as they are on a DVD. So something so simple was becoming ever more complex and this is when I realised that this is very much like playing most RPGs.

Nothing is ever simple. For example, you're tasked with the defeat of the "World Eater" or what have you (makes me wonder where this World Eater plans on living after devouring the entire planet), but this is not immediately possible no matter how bad-ass you are because you'll need this sword which can only be found in this cave. However, to gain access to said cave you need to find a map that has that location and the owner of that map is lost somewhere in the wild. The last person to see the map owner needs you to run an errand for them, which requires you to travel to a place in the game world you presently don't have access to. This is what was happening with this upgrade. In the end it would be a worthwhile upgrade but at the time, I found myself having an RPG experience unwillingly.

To cut a long story short, I found a way to get the drivers onto the system via one of the test platforms, which is probably analogous to using a save game editor or console commands. It worked and I finally had USB support and I could get on with completing my upgrade. I did think that I would be in a very difficult position had I not had access to another system, perhaps even forcing me to rebuild the old machine just to go online to retrieve the required drivers.

There's no real point to this tale, but if you're going to perform an upgrade without reloading your operating system take it from me and make sure you have all the required drivers on your hard drive (extracted if they are compressed). Keep a PS2 keyboard or mouse around and save yourself hours of frustration. Unlike a real RPG, no part of this exercise is fun. In essence, prepare for your upgrade, which is something I sadly didn't do and as a result I lost anywhere between six to twelve hours of my day. **NAG**

TAURUS:
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➤ **PSU**

Corsair AX1500i PSU
R6,499 / www.corsair.com



➤ **GRAPHICS**

GIGABYTE GV-N78TGHZ-3GD
R10,999 / www.gigabyte.com



➤ **OS DRIVE**

OCZ Vector Vector 150
R2,808 / www.ocz.com



➤ **STORAGE DRIVE**

WD Black 4TB FZEX
R3,199 / www.wdc.com



➤ **CHASSIS**

Corsair Obsidian 900D
R4,299 / www.corsair.com



➤ **DISPLAY**

ASUS VG248QE
R5,999 / www.asus.com



➤ **KEYBOARD**

Razer BlackWidow Ultimate
R1,700 / www.razerzone.com



➤ **COOLER**

Cooler Master Nepton 280L
R1,499 / www.coolermaster.com



➤ **MOUSE**

GAMDIAS Zeus gaming mouse
R918 / www.gamdias.com



➤ **MOUSE MAT**

Razer Ironclad
R599 / www.razerzone.com



➤ **SOUND**

Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R3,499 / www.soundblaster.com



➤ **HEADPHONES**

Plantronics GameCom Commander
R4,569 / www.plantronics.com



INTEL

INTEL CORE I7 5960X
R13,299 / www.intel.com

MSI X99S XPOWER AC
R5,899 / www.msi.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE LPX DDR4 2,800MHZ 16GB KIT
R6,199 / www.corsair.com



INTEL DREAM MACHINE

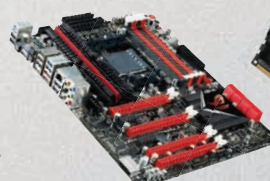
R71,984

AMD

AMD FX 8350
R2,999 / www.amd.com

ASUS CROSSHAIR V FORMULA-Z
R3,999 / www.asus.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE PRO 2,666MHZ C11 16GB KIT
R4,999 / www.corsair.com



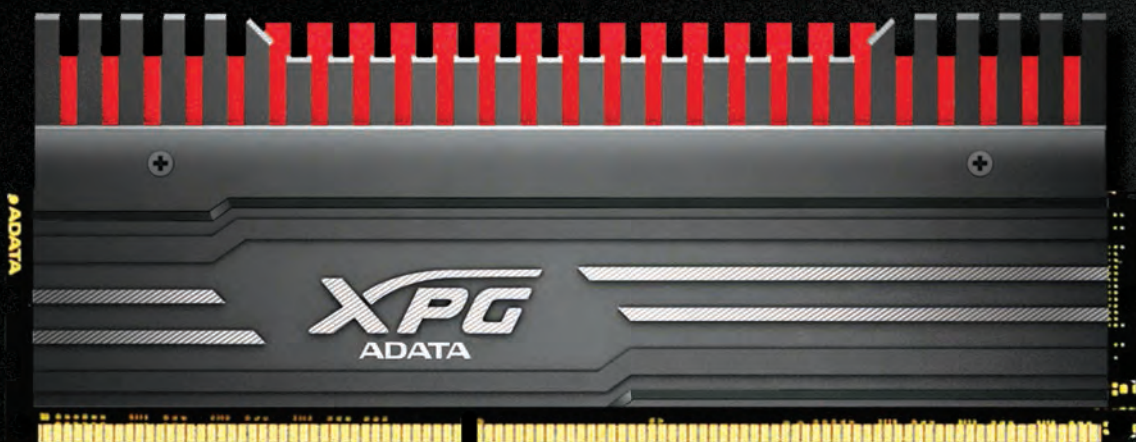
AMD DREAM MACHINE

R58,584

DREAM MACHINE



DDDR4 is here and it couldn't have come at a better time, coinciding with the release of the first desktop 8-core CPU. In the next couple of years, all platforms will transition to this new memory standard, primarily because of power efficiency and performance. The differences for the desktop are fairly obvious with DDR4 officially starting where DDR3 stopped. If the previous memory standards are anything to go by, performance over the next decade will increase tremendously while capacities and power draw diminishes appropriately. It's important to note that DDR4, while sharing the same physical dimensions as DDR3, has a different notch, pin count and operating voltage, thus they are incompatible. DDR4 uses 288 pins and operates at 1.2V as opposed to DDR3's 240 pins and 1.5V operating voltage. DDR4 is currently supported on the Intel HEDT X-99 and Socket 2011-3 platform exclusively. In Q3 of 2015 however, the Z170/LGA 1151 performance platform will transition to DDR4 as well. AMD should follow suit with their new products in 2016. Below are some basic differences between the two memory types that should give you a more practical understanding of what this means for you and your computing devices.



DDR3

➤ CAPACITY

Consumer or desktop DDR3 modules are generally limited to 8GB per DIMM, so kits are usually anywhere between 2x1GB all the way to 8x8GB. Realistically that means the most amount of memory any one desktop system can have is 64GB. This is plenty of memory and even though memory requirements have increased substantially since the introduction of DDR3, it's tapered off, and at present there are many modern functional machines with 4GB of memory total. With that said, this may not be the case going forward and increasing memory capacity in a cost effective way has hit its limits. What DDR3 offers at present is still more than enough for gamers and the most demanding power users. At present the average memory capacity for gaming systems is 8GB, configured as 2x4GB DIMMs.

➤ PERFORMANCE

Hard to believe but DDR3 is seven years old, giving it a much longer lifespan than

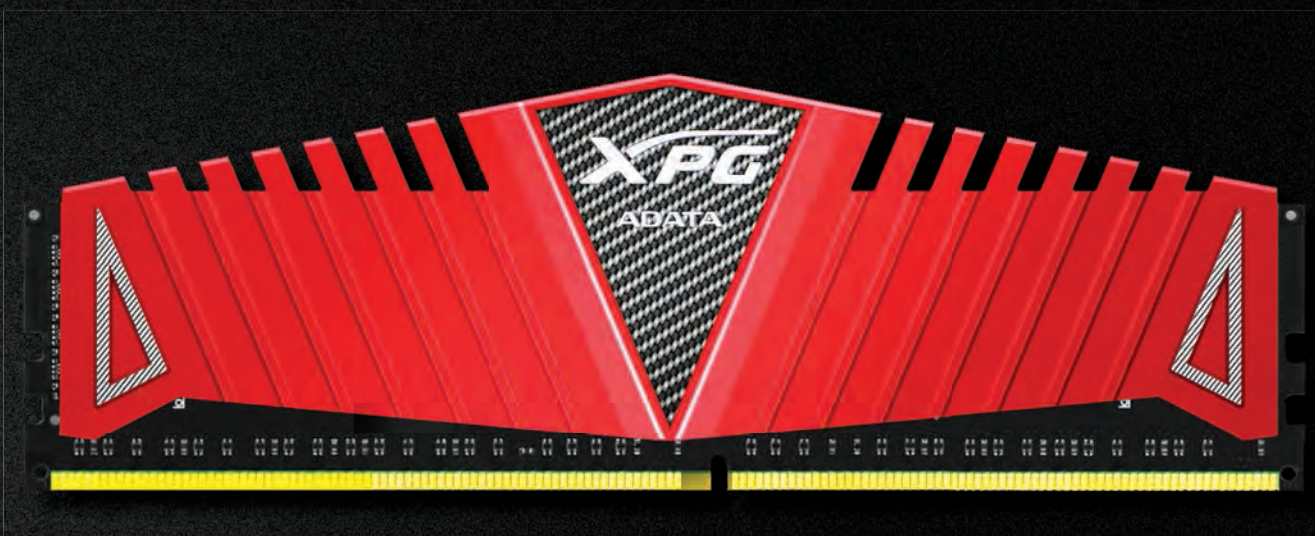
both DDR and DDR2 memory. It's gone from requiring 1.8V for the early 1GB sticks to the more commonly used 1.5V memory. Low voltage DDR3 (DDR3LV) has further decreased this to 1.35V allowing it to be used within TDP limited devices and platforms. Frequencies have also gone from a lowly 1,066MHz right up to 3,200MHz kits. These are rare and costly but they are on the market and can be purchased at most major retailers. Real world performance has improved with the refinement of memory controllers and improved caches and caching mechanisms within the various CPUs. Latency has increased in favour of frequencies, but modern day systems benefit more from the higher frequency and increased bandwidth. 2,666MHz seems to be the ideal frequency for most systems where there are just enough wait states to not compromise overall performance, but offer plenty of bandwidth as well. For interests sake bandwidth at this speed is anywhere between 21.3GB/s to a hair over

85GB/s in theory. Most systems will utilize around 70% of the available theoretical bandwidth. What's great about DDR3 is that its long life has allowed vendors to fine tune its performance to where it is offering very high efficiency thus keeping itself relevant far surpassing its intended life cycle.

➤ PRICE

DDR3 as with all new memory types began with high prices, but as always they decreased until they hit the bottom. In fact the prices were so low that it was detrimental to the industry, driving competitors away and threatening the livelihood of its participants. Prices began to rise again and with diminished competition, the industry has been recovering at a healthy rate. For the end user, DDR3 is costlier than it was at its lowest but still very affordable compared to DDR4. You can pick up a good gaming set of memory these days for around R2,000 with the equivalent DDR4 capacity retailing for the same, but for a single stick of memory.

VERSUS



DDR4

➊ CAPACITY

A huge selling point for DDR4 is that DRAM capacities per module can be as high as 16GB with some working, demo 32GB DIMMs scheduled for release in the near future. In theory, at least for the desktop and supporting platforms, this allows up to 128GB of system memory. What this change will likely do is grow the average system memory capacity from 8GB to 16GB, while simultaneously allowing single CPU servers greater capacities via UDIMMs.

➋ PERFORMANCE

DDR4 officially starts at 2133MHz which is the limit for DDR3 according to the JEDEC specification. Not that this means much because the vast majority of DDR4 modules on the market are 2400MHz or higher with some from G.Skill reaching 3,333MHz already. In DDR4's lifespan these frequencies will climb well above the 4,200MHz mark. Other than frequency and capacity, the major benefit

for DDR4 is its low power requirements compared to its predecessor. DIMMs usually operate at 1.2V with an unofficial DDR4 low voltage spec citing voltages as low as 1.05V. Lower heat output, operating voltage, power draw and higher frequencies mean DDR4 is better than DDR3 in all meaningful ways. It is also suitable for use in different devices from smart phones to servers, with only the form factor changing of course. As far as logic and implementation is concerned however, it is consistent across the various platforms.

At present the only existing desktop system memory controller allows anywhere between 50 to 70% of the theoretical bandwidth utilisation. This is system side however and is not related to how well DDR4 modules will perform on other systems. The only existing memory controller is in its first iteration and they will improve over time along with the DRAM frequencies, thus it is feasible

to reach the same efficiency levels in future as with DDR3 and possibly higher with systems delivering over 100GB/s in system bandwidth.

➌ PRICE

At present DDR4 pricing is comparatively high, especially for the high performance kits. The memory densities have not increased as vendors are mostly selling 4GB DIMMs with a few moving to 8GB. The vast majority of kits are 16GB and even at such capacities, you're looking at paying anything between R6,000 to R8,999 for 2,666MHz, compared to half that much for the equivalent frequency DDR3 kit. At the lower end with 2,133MHz, the prices are about the same for 4GB DIMMs which is promising even this early into the memory's life cycle. As more competitors enter the arena and ICs become more plentiful, prices will fall in line with DDR3 prices. **NAG**

AORUS X3 Plus

Website / www.aorus.com

ERP / R29,999

Supplier / AORUS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4860HQ
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 870M 4GB
MEMORY	16GB DDR3 1,600MHz
STORAGE	475GB SSD (RAID 0)
OPTICAL DRIVE	None
WEIGHT	1.9kg

The first AORUS product that we reviewed a few issues back, the X7, was a noteworthy offering but had a few issues (no Optimus support for instance). The X3 though, is precisely what we wanted to see. Despite that it is not as powerful as the X7 and is a different form factor, it is a more complete product.

Let's get our niggles out the way first though. The glass trackpad that AORUS has chosen for the X3 is without question the worst trackpad we've ever come across. It will not track if you slide from the left and right edges and it causes a build-up of friction between the surface and your finger like on the X7. Move the cursor around long enough or rapidly and your finger will get stuck. In essence it's unusable and this is made worse by that fact that AORUS will not ship a gaming mouse with the unit in all regions. Fortunately here in SA there will be a mouse with it, so should you decide you want this notebook, make sure you receive a mouse with your unit. For that we had to subtract two points, because it's analogous to admiring a beautiful painting then noticing it has a tear right in the middle of the canvas.

The rest however is impressive. This is one fine looking notebook that's compact, light and very well designed. It's aesthetically pleasing without going over the top and it makes a strong case for itself against Ultrabooks even though it's a fully-fledged gaming notebook. Powered by the GTX 870M, it handles all games splendidly on its 3200x1800 screen provided you play at 1080p. What makes the image even better is that the 13.9" screen packs the pixels very close to each other giving the impression of looking at a quasi-retina display (264ppi). The text is too small to read in some programs but for the most part, programs scale well and reading text won't strain your eyes.

The sound system is a little better than we expected given the small dimensions. It managed to be loud enough to use without the need for headphones, but obviously

BENCHMARK RESULTS

PC Mark 8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL accelerated): **4,212**

Battery time: **2h 37m 33s**

3DMark Fire Strike: **4,345**

Catzilla 1080p: **5,899**



sounds best with a set of cans plugged in. It won't give you the same auditory experience as that which you get on the competing notebooks with Sound Blaster Cinema implementation but it's acceptable for gaming sessions and movies.

We often talk of component balance and with the X3 Plus it's no different. The choice of CPU is puzzling because the 4860HQ is more expensive than the 4710HQ even though the 4710HQ has a 100MHz base frequency advantage, but a lower turbo frequency again by 100MHz. However, the 4860HQ offers Intel's Iris Pro 5200 IGP which is very competent but wasted here because of the discrete GTX 870M GPU. We do feel a better choice here could have been made which would at the very least reduce the price of the notebook.

Overall this is a solid offering from AORUS. It's not quite there yet as there are still some oversights for the asking price, which may be too much for some.

However, in concept we can't fault the X3. It still manages to impress more than the X7 which is a good notebook to begin with. If you're able to overlook some of the shortcomings this may be the most intriguing and most powerful 13.9" gaming notebook you can buy. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8 With all things considered AORUS has followed the X7 with a worthy X3 stable mate that isn't perfect, but does strike the right notes in the right places.

PLUS / Looks wonderful / Great specs / 3200x1800 display

MINUS / Atrocious trackpad / Software provided on optical media

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SPECS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4710HQ
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 880M 8GB
MEMORY	32GB DDR3 1,600MHz (dual channel)
STORAGE	4x 128GB SSD RAID / 1TB 7.2K RPM HDD
OPTICAL DRIVE	Blu-ray writer
WEIGHT	3.78kg

MSI has been working hard and fast to deliver a successor to the GT70 GeForce 880M powered notebook we reviewed previously. Usually one would expect that there's little to no need to upgrade or introduce a new high-end notebook SKU if it's still based on largely unchanged technology. In MSI's case however, the GT72 has changed enough in numerous ways that a new unit is justified and that's the one we spent a few weeks with.

High-end notebooks are always going to be a hard sell because their price range puts them in direct comparison with Apple notebooks in terms of presentation and quality, simultaneously pitting them against high-end desktop/enthusiast machines. Striking the right balance is something that no vendor has managed yet. The GT72 doesn't do this either, but it is a step in the right direction.

Built around the 47W Core i7 4710HQ CPU, it has four cores with eight logical threads at its disposal, 32GB of DDR3 1,600MHz memory and no fewer than four 128GB M.2 drives configured in RAID. This gives you a total of 475GB useable solid state drive space, backed by a 7200rpm 1TB disk. The combination of this hardware makes for the fastest notebook we've ever used. Be it reboots, cold boots, or whatever, there's simply no waiting. Programs open up instantly and if there's any delay it'll be because you're making use of the optical drive or waiting for software on the Internet. Short of that, the system is snappy and should remain so for years on end regardless of how much software you load on the system. That is barring the Norton Security package which has always been and continues to be an invasive piece of software.

More about software, the SteelSeries utility that is bundled with this notebook that allows customisation of the keyboard needs some serious work. MSI has a shortcut key on the left of the notebook that allows you to cycle through four different lighting

schemes. The only problem is none of those schemes include a simple on/off mode. That is, you cycle through a dual colour mode, breathing effect, an audio responsive mode and whatever else that has been cooked up. However, simply turning off the lights or having a basic single colour backlight is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the ability to change brightness levels isn't anywhere within the software but relies on a key combination on the opposite end of the keyboard.

It is perhaps this and the speakers where the GT72 has its biggest flaws. The drivers have been improved and you do have a much deeper bass and the audio in general is much richer. However, even at maximum volume it's relatively disappointing. It will not produce any distortion but in our opinion it's not loud enough. Other than this, the notebook is peerless when it comes to these kinds of machines. It feels lighter than the GT70, it is certainly designed to look better and the carry bag you receive with it is much improved. Again, powered by the 880M there's not a single game you can throw at the GT72 that will not run at

butter smooth frame rates. Technically we can't fault it. In the synthetic tests we did not achieve the claimed 1,600MB/s read speed, but that isn't important anyway as it was the 4K read and write performance that blew us away delivering the best numbers we've seen out of any storage solution. This is one seriously expensive but equally powerful notebook. It's not ever going to be described as lean or light, but powerful it most certainly is. The fastest gaming notebook just got faster. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko

BENCHMARK RESULTS

PC Mark 8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL accelerated): **4,699**
Battery time: **1h 5m 6s**
3DMark Fire Strike: **5,160**
Catzilla 1080p: **7,691**



9

Ultra high-end gaming notebook that's a worthy successor to the GT70.

PLUS / GTX 880M GPU / Marginally lighter than GT70 / Runs relatively quiet and cool

MINUS / SteelSeries keyboard software / Poor speaker system / Regular 1080p screen



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MSI X99S XPOWER AC

Website / www.msi.com

ERP / R5,899

Supplier / MSI

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X99
MEMORY	8x 288 pin DDR5
CPU SUPPORT	LGA 2011-3
EXPANSION	5x PCIe 16X
SIZE	E-ATX

Intel released nothing short of a kraken with the Core i7 5960X. Not only did we receive the first desktop 8-core CPU for the HEDT platform, but we got DDR4, a new socket and of course a new chipset. Usually a single change in either of these presents a massive challenge for vendors but having all that change at the same time is the equivalent of pulling the rug out from underneath them.

With X99, the opportunity came for MSI to hit the ground running with refined motherboards that not only deliver performance but bring in a host of new features previously unavailable to the HEDT platform. This is especially true for this chipset because X79 has aged and is very much out of tune with what's on offer with Z87 let alone Z97.

With that we now have boards such as the X99X XPOWER AC. Not only does it have a host of new features that bring it in line with what the Z97 XPOWER AC has, but it extends this further. Since this platform has plenty of PCI Express lanes, (barring the 5820K), there's no need for MSI to try and siphon off PCI Express bandwidth from elsewhere to support both M.2 and SATA Express. With 40 lanes of traffic made available, MSI has allowed their M.2 slot to allocate up to a blistering 32Gbps of traffic to it. The great thing about this is that you can do this while maintaining your dual GPU configuration at full 16X speed or perhaps even triple GPU configuration at 8X speeds. All these lanes would come from the CPU and not the PCH (platform controller hub), thus leaving the PCH to support SATA Express as well as the standard SATA 6Gbps ports amongst other things.

MSI has done exactly that and offered the most connectivity options in the history of their motherboards. That is a total of 12 USB ports at the rear of which only two are USB 2.0, dual gigabit Ethernet, seven SATA 6Gbps ports, a single SATA Express port and as mentioned before M.2 support.

Back again is the GPU ceasefire (turns off specific PCI-Express lanes), direct to

BIOS button, v-check points, LN2/slow mode, Bclk and CPU multiplier buttons and a whole lot more. For overclocking features, MSI has you covered and there's nothing preventing you from reaching world record speeds or claiming high scores with this motherboard. It is simply a matter of fine tuning and pushing your chosen components to their limits.

Of particular interest to note is that MSI, despite DDR4 being very new and vendors having to deal with how it behaves, has included several memory clocking profiles and some helpful descriptions within their UEFI on how each setting affects performance and stability. Not only that, but the tuning options that MSI has made available are second to none offering more than any other vendor at present. Navigating the UEFI is as smooth as it's always been and sifting through pages upon pages of options is an overclocker's dream which MSI has provided with the X99S XPOWER AC.

When we wrote this review, we were still on the first few iterations of the firmware, thus things were not as smooth as they would be on say the Z97 MPOWER, but

that will change as the firmware matures and more is learned about the platform. In the meantime there's no reason for you to not invest in this board. It even has the dedicated hardware controlled NIC and better than average audio solution. Given just how long this platform is going to be around, we would say that MSI definitely got off to a great start and finds itself ahead in many ways. This board is not ever going to be cheap but it is one of two motherboards that we would consider when looking at the very high end of X99 motherboards. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

7 MSI has produced yet another incredible overclocking motherboard that has the potential to be the quintessential X99 motherboard.

PLUS / Great looks / Plenty of features / Detailed UEFI

MINUS / Some consistency issues / Still needs some UEFI refinement





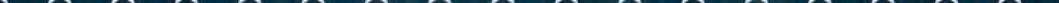
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BALLISTIX™

Intel Core i7 5960X

► Website / www.intel.com

► ERP / R13,299

► Supplier / Intel

SPECS	CORE	22nm Haswell-E
	FREQUENCY	3,000MHz (3.5GHz Turbo)
	CACHE	22.5MB Total (20MB L3)
	TDP	140W
	PLATFORM	LGA 2011-3 (X99)

After an eternity, we have finally rid ourselves of the X79 platform. It was good while it lasted, but it had truly become long in the tooth. Add to which, for enthusiasts, it limited our options because short of ASUS motherboards, no other vendor managed to manufacture a competent motherboard in a meaningful time frame. EVGA did it eventually with the X79 Dark but that was literally just a few months ago, when you consider that the X79 is from 2011, in computing terms that's an eternity ago. Especially since its inception we had Ivy Bridge, Haswell and Devil's Canyon CPUs along with three chipsets.

If you weren't aware of this, Intel differentiates, or rather segments their desktop platform into three parts; Mainstream, Performance and Extreme. The Performance segments are by and large in sync with only variations in processor type. Sockets are identical and so is technology support for the most part (vPro etc.). For the Extreme or HEDT (High-End Desktop) segment there is virtually no compatibility with the rest. This segment actually shares its platform with the server/Xeon solutions thus its cadence is not in any way related to what we see with the other two. There are many reasons why this is so including the need for Intel to maximise its customer investments (Xeon platforms are many times more expensive). There's a need to eliminate as many errata issues as possible with any given technology, feature or process node as well.

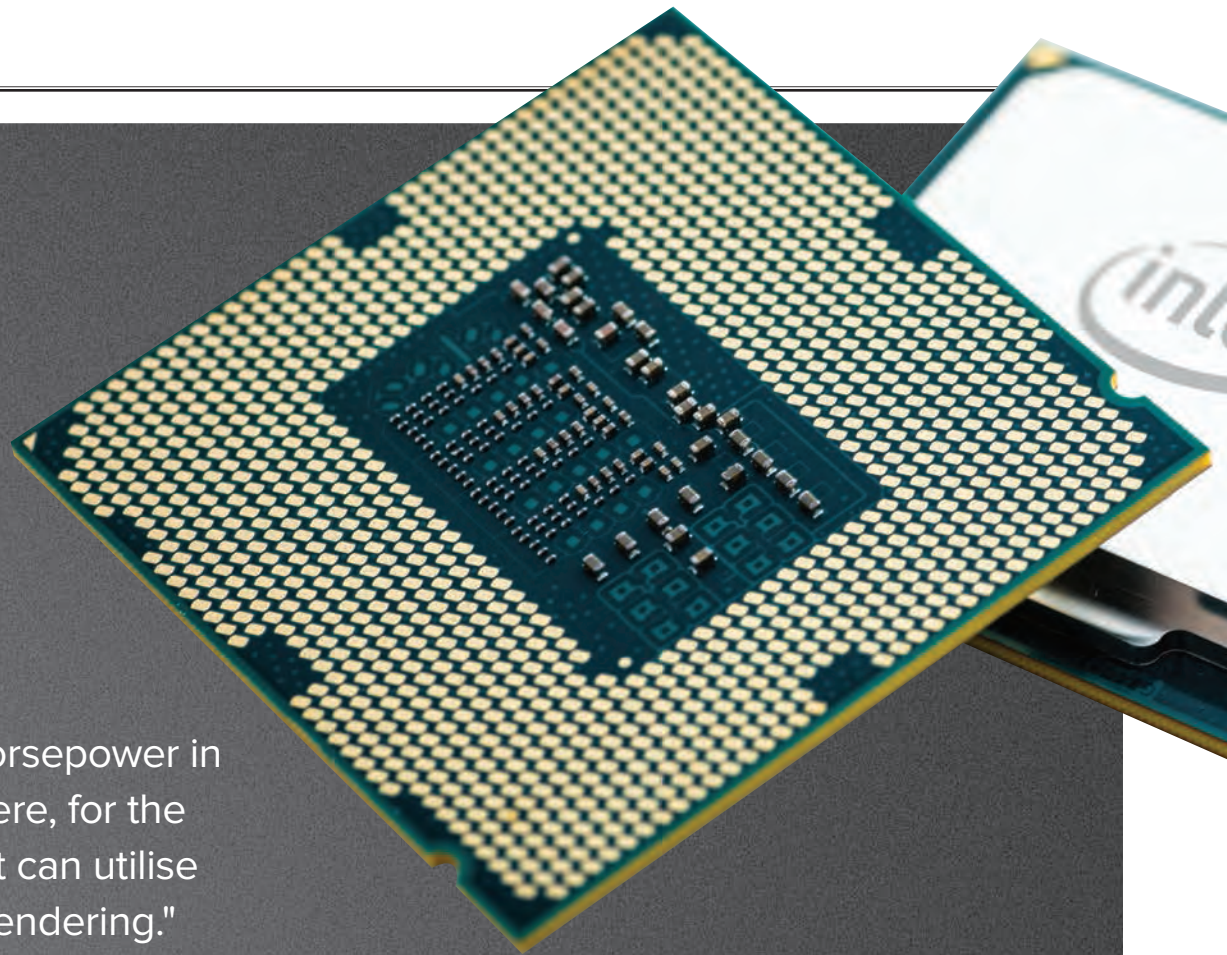
Given the numerous changes that had been introduced to the mainstream since 2011, with the X99 chipset and C610 PCH (X79 was C600) Intel once again brings the HEDT platform in line with their current offerings. There are few missing features, like Intel Smart Connect, and obviously no IGP but other than that it has a matching feature set. One advantage for the new C610 PCH is that it actually has more native SATA 6Gbps connections than on the C216 (Z97) PCH at 10 compared to six.



All this and significantly more go hand in hand with what the new CPU and platform as a whole offer. Even though the previous generation LGA 2011 CPUs were built around the 22nm node, the chipset was a 65nm part with a max TDP of 7.8W. Intel has reduced this to a 32nm part with a slightly lower 6.5W TDP. This is in contrast to all the CPUs being 140W parts compared to the previous 130W of the previous family.

That is all about the surrounding platform though, we here are specifically looking at the CPU and this is once again a leap forward in desktop computing. Believe it or not, Intel does not shy away from what this

CPU is intended for and explicitly puts it out there that it's for overclockers, enthusiasts/gamers and content creators. That doesn't mean you can't use it for all kinds of other number crunching, but it is something Intel is embracing, to the point where it's even in the press material. It should come as no surprise though because a good six to 12 months prior to the release of this CPU a very public Intel engineer asked on his Twitter account how many overclockers would be interested in an 8-core/16-thread part. Even with the small pool of competitive overclockers by comparison to gamers, the interest was obvious. Fast forward to the



"The sheer horsepower in the CPU is there, for the programs that can utilise it, like video rendering."

present and we have our first eight core part. We are not saying this is the reason Intel released this SKU. However it's worth mentioning that the current 5930K could have easily remained at the helm, as the premier and fastest desktop CPU money could buy. Instead we have the current 5960X with an unprecedented number of threads.

Amongst the numerous changes, we also have a new memory type to contend with. This will be covered in future DDR4 memory reviews, but briefly stated, even in these early days we've seen some sizeable performance gains in bandwidth. The latency may be higher than before, but the consistently higher frequencies negate the longer wait states and we have even better DRAM frequency utilization, in addition to a lower TDP for the memory. That does mean that memory prices are slightly unfriendly, but this is only because we have grown accustomed to the dirt cheap DDR3 prices which actually jeopardized the DRAM market in the long run, eliminating competitors, ultimately limiting consumer choice. DDR4 has some room to grow in both performance and lower prices but right now it is an investment that you have to make to get on the X99 platform.

What you do get should you decide to buy into this CPU is unparalleled performance in just about every program

you can imagine. Logic would dictate that the 5960X at a nominal frequency of 3GHz (3.5GHz Turbo) should be slower than the 4790K and the 4960X, however this isn't so. Be it the gigantic L3 cache, or the blisteringly fast L1 and L2 (or perhaps a combination), the 5960X manages to match both these CPUs even with the massive frequency disadvantage. This is easy to see when you overclock the CPU. At a moderate 4GHz, it outpaces the other CPUs at 4.6GHz in just about every test as well. You'll not magically get higher in game frame rates, those are entirely about your GPU, but should you employ two high-end GPUs or more you'll notice this. To look at it from that point of view though is missing the point of the 5960X. It's only when you load real multi-threaded workloads where the CPU shines. To put that into perspective, a single 4790K cooled with liquid nitrogen at a blistering 6.2GHz with all eight threads made available (few samples can achieve this) is slower in Cinebench, XTU and wPrime than a 5960X operating at 4.5GHz. Perhaps an unfair comparison, well how about a 4960X with all its 12 threads available at 5.6GHz coming up short against a 5960X at a standard 3.5GHz. To champion this point home, some 3DMark records were broken with the CPU using air cooling that were previously set by the 4960X that was cooled via liquid nitrogen.

The sheer horsepower in the CPU is there, for the programs that can utilise it, like video rendering. You may be able to encode video using your GPU, but just working with raw footage is something that you can't accelerate in that manner which the 5960X handles very well. The difference in performance is only made more apparent when you deal with 4K content which is just staggering in its bandwidth and space requirements. This is the new king of the hill; it's not an incremental change, but it's a new landscape where the immense amount of compute power made available on the desktop rivals that of seriously expensive work stations of three or four years ago.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko

10

We've nothing to dislike about this CPU, it is as good as it gets with current manufacturing technology.

PLUS / 16 threads / Incredible performance
DDR4 controller

MINUS / Needs new memory and motherboard

CM Storm Novatouch TKL

Website / www.coolermaster.com

ERP / TBA Supplier / Cooler Master

Cooler Master has returned with another short/numpad-less gaming keyboard. If you need your numpad then read no further as this keyboard is not for you. Should it be of no value to you, this just may be the keyboard you've always wanted.

The big draw with this one over the Rapid-I is that Cooler Master is using their own custom switches and rubber dome housing to reduce the noise produced when two plastic parts collide. This housing (or base) obviously alters how the keys feel but oddly enough it's for the better. Not only does this reduce noise but it makes for a softer touch that still caters to gamers but would work very well for those who just use it for typing exclusively. Cooler Master has not tossed Cherry MX key compatibility out the window with the TKL. You may still use your standard caps and replace the ones that ship with this keyboard. Cooler Master provides a set of tongs for this in the package.

In the days where gaming peripheral vendors are trying to cram as much as they can onto their keyboards, Cooler Master is going the opposite direction with no dedicated media keys, but simple function key shortcuts. A minimalist design will not appeal to everybody but it must be said that this keyboard does look decisively dull. It's a thick rectangle with not an angle or curve to be found. It works well enough at its primary purpose but it can be even better with a little bit of time invested in the aesthetics. For what it is though, it does a good job and fans of this kind of keyboard should find it very appealing. For the rest of the gaming population this may be just a tad too barren to warrant a switch from the tried and trusted keyboards with macro and media keys let alone USB hubs.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko



7

The Novatouch TKL is a more refined version of the Rapid-I. The new key switches feel great and they should find fans in just about every market.

PLUS / Reduced clicking noise / Great build quality / Compatible with Cherry MX key caps

MINUS / Basic layout / Some people do actually use the keypad / Looks bland

Corsair Vengeance LPX DDR4 2,800MHz 16GB Kit

Website / www.corsair.com

ERP / R5,799 Supplier / Rectron

SPECS	FREQUENCY	2,800MHz
	TIMINGS	16-18-18-36 (XMP 2.0)
	VOLTAGE	1.2V

What's important to know about this kit is that it's a 288-pin DDR4 set. So only look to it if you are on the X99 platform and seeking compatible high performance DRAM.

Unlike the previous Vengeance series, the LPX is a low profile 1.2V kit that is rated at 2.8GHz. The timings are higher than what you'd see with DDR3, but don't be fooled by that. The operating voltage is very low and the kit does not heat up at all during operation. The performance is plentiful provided you have configured your system properly. XMP does help with this (of which there are two profiles) as the X99 CPU is very sensitive to the Uncore frequency. Be advised that this clock has a great deal to do with how much performance you can extract from any set of memory.

Assuming you're well versed with the intricacies of X99 system tuning you'll find that the LPX delivers in both performance and overclocking headroom. In our limited testing we were not only able to run the pre-configured 3,000MHz XMP profile (it switches to 1.35V) but with further tuning we pushed to 3,000MHz 15-15-15-36 1T which matches the performance of kits costing nearly twice as much. With motherboards improving at a rapid pace we've no doubt that you'll be able to extract even more from this set in future. As it is, this is still one very expensive but great performing kit with the potential to go even further. Unlike previous Corsair kits, you're not going to get a memory cooler here. This is understandable for two reasons which are primarily because the DRAM just doesn't get hot at all, sometimes not even warm. Second is that for the X99 motherboards, the DIMMS are on opposite sides of the motherboard much like it was with X79, thus you'd need two DRAM coolers for a single kit which would further drive prices up.

For its sheer performance and overclocking/tuning headroom, we are adding this kit to our Intel Dream Machine Rig.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko



7

The Corsair LPX set is sold as 2,800, but in truth will reach much higher speeds with even better timings. It's undersold but certainly over delivers.

PLUS / Has 3,000MHz XMP profile / Great overclocking headroom

MINUS / Like all DDR4, it's expensive / Availability

Plextor M6e 256GB PCIe SSD

Website / www.goplextor.com

ERP / R3,799 Supplier / Plextor

SPECS	CONTROLLER	Marvell 88SS9183
	NAND TYPE	19nm Toshiba Toggle Advanced
	CACHE	N/A
	FORM FACTOR	PCI Express X4
	INTERFACE	PCI Express

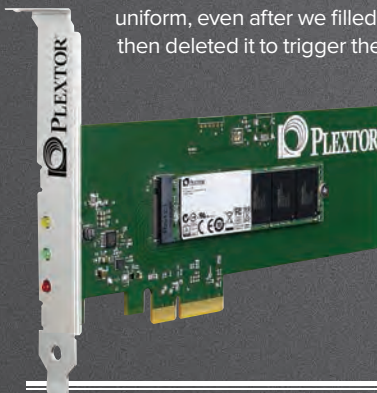
The Plextor M6e is a PCI Express solution but it's actually an M.2 drive mounted on a PCI Express card. There's nothing preventing you from installing this directly onto a supporting motherboard, but you'll not want to do that for two reasons. Firstly it will void your warranty, and secondly you'll lose out on performance. This is unless you use any Z97 or later ASRock motherboard which wires twice the lanes to their M.2 socket allowing up to PCI Express X4 speeds, which happens to be the link speed of the card anyway.

With full support for AHCI, the M6e will allow you to boot from it and use it as a regular drive on your system. The firmware is loaded even before your UEFI, thus it will show up in your UEFI/BIOS as a bootable device.

So why then would you want this drive? It's a simple matter of speed. Right now you'll not find a much faster SATA 6Gbps drive than this one. Even the mighty impressive OCZ Vertex 150/180, Intel's 700 series and Samsung's EVO drives will not match the M6e where it counts. If you look at the benchmarks you'll see that the queue-depth numbers are good, however we've recorded higher from regular SATA drives. Do not be put off however as these numbers are not as important as they once were. Simply put, compared to the fastest SAS 15K mechanical drives, the M6e is still several orders of magnitude faster.

The write speed on the M6e is superb but what really shows the advantage of perhaps the PCI Express interface is the very low maximum IO response time which we recorded at 7.2ms. It's also worth noting that throughout the drive from the first block to the last, the throughput uniform, even after we filled the drive with junk data, then deleted it to trigger the TRIM command, the M6e

showed remarkable performance. Ultimately this is for the power users and gamers with deep pockets and avid desire for speed. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko



8

This may not be the fastest drive we've ever tested, but it is right up there in performance and the price is really low for this kind of performance.

PLUS / Very good performance / Five year warranty

MINUS / Nothing

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Southern African Federation
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www.safact.co.za

Delux T20 gaming keyboard

- Website / www.crownhyperworld.co.za
- ERP / R399 Supplier / Crown Hyper World

SPECS	WINDOWS KEY LOCK	Yes
	ANTI-GHOSTING	Up to ten simultaneous key presses
	INPUTS	2x USB 2.0 / SD, T-Flash card reader
	MACRO KEYS	10 (eight extra on expansion slot)

This gaming keyboard costs R399, and yet it touts many of the features that are available on keyboards that cost three or four times as much. Those words should make you sit up and take notice if you're looking to buy a gaming keyboard, but are on a very, very tight budget.

Even without knowing the retail price beforehand, it's immediately apparent upon removing the Delux T20 from its packaging that it lacks the high-end quality promised by more recognisable peripheral brands. The materials used aren't quite as impressive, with cheap-feeling plastics and an ever-so-slightly crude aesthetic permeating its design. Aside from its lack of ostentatious flair, however, there's not much wrong with the T20's build.

There's no backlighting for the keys (although the built-in volume dial does light up blue), but the most important gaming-related keys are coloured red to make them easier to spot. Five macro keys line the left side of the board, split between two memory banks – and in the box you'll find a USB-powered companion board containing eight more macro keys, should you need them. There are no dedicated media controls, aside from the volume dial. Typing on the T20 is comfortable, but the long travel distance of the keys is something you may need to acclimatise to.

There's a plastic flap on the right-hand side of the keyboard, concealing a USB 2.0 port (there's also another one of these at the keyboard's top-right) and SD/T-Flash card readers, which are useful features to have. Ultimately, it's tough to find anything to complain about with the Delux T20, because at just under R400, we can't imagine there's a cheaper gaming keyboard out there.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



7

For the price, this is a great keyboard – but its overall quality obviously can't match its high-end rivals.

PLUS / Super cheap / Solid features

MINUS / Feels as cheap as it is / Lack of media controls

Mionix Avior 7000 and Sargas 400

- Website / www.dcstore.co.za
- ERP / R849 (mouse) R269 (mouse mat)
- Supplier / DC Store

SPECS	SENSOR	7,000dpi optical
	BUTTONS	9 (programmable)
	MEMORY	128KB
	POLLING RATE	1,000Hz

Most gaming mice try so very hard to be so very good at a particular thing, but the Avior on review here seems to go out of its way to be the best at everything, to everyone. It certainly makes a good effort at it.

It's not often that an ambidextrous mouse is this comfortable. Sure, those over-hanging wings on the sides are a little bulky and might not suit every variation of grip style, but in general the Avior 7000 is great for both palm and claw positions. The excellent balance between side button position and weight distribution (which tends towards being light, with no weights) furthers this by giving you plenty of options for where you support the device with your fingers.

This high level of comfort is met with solid specs under the hood, and Mionix has done a good job of bringing together its technical capabilities with an extensive piece of software to customise the device's internal workings. Lift-off distance, LED colour, macro programming and all the settings you'd expect to find are present, and there's a neat little tool that analyses the quality of your mouse surface. The Mionix Sargas 400, which pairs so well with this mouse you'd think they were designed in tandem, measures 80%. One of the old NAG mouse mats clocked in at just 60%, so there's a cool but probably pretty arbitrary measurement for you.

NAG

- Geoff Burrows



7

An excellent mouse that will suit both right and left-handed gamers equally. It's not perfect, but it's one of the best for what it offers.

PLUS / Plenty of customisation options / Very comfortable / Mouse mat feels great

MINUS / Design takes a bit of getting used to

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might get your share!



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Logitech G402

Website / gaming.logitech.com

ERP / TBA Supplier / Logitech

SPECS	SENSOR	Up to 4,000 DPI
	BUTTONS	8 (programmable)
	ACCELERATION	Over 16 G
	REPORT RATE (USB)	Up to 1,000 reports per second

Designed specifically with first-person shooters in mind, Logitech calls the G402 the “world’s fastest gaming mouse”, driven by their new Fusion Engine hybrid sensor tech. I don’t know what a Fusion Engine is, nor can I be sure that this is the world’s fastest mouse, but I do know that the G402 is a fantastic gaming mouse.

Compared to Logitech’s G502, the G402 is fairly simplistic in terms of customisation options. There’s no weight management system. You can’t fine-tune the optical sensor to your liking. It doesn’t have as many buttons. Its scroll wheel doesn’t do left/right scrolling and can’t be switched between smooth scrolling and individual clicks. It doesn’t need any of that. In fact, the G402’s no-fuss approach is a welcome one.

It’s an incredibly light mouse (which may not be to everyone’s liking, obviously), and its contoured design proves to be plenty comfortable, no matter your grip style. Its elongated shape and super-long left and right buttons should make it a great fit for any size of hand. Logitech has clearly given loads of thought to button placement, as all the most important buttons are well within reach, while all the buttons you wouldn’t want to accidentally press in the middle of a heated skirmish are placed far away from hotspots on the mouse.

Logitech’s software continues to be powerful and easy to use, letting you easily reprogram buttons and customise your sensitivity settings from within a pleasantly visual interface. A nice touch is the inclusion of a “shift” button on the mouse, which when held down temporarily adjusts the mouse’s sensitivity to a predefined setting – so, for example, you can quickly switch to a lower DPI level if you’re doing some careful sniping.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



9

The G402 is another outstanding mouse from Logitech.

PLUS / Comfortable / As always, software is excellent

MINUS / Nothing

Razer Surround Pro

Website / www.razerzone.com

ERP / \$19.99 Supplier / Razer Inc.

SPECS	OS SUPPORTED	Windows 7/8/8.1
	HDD SPACE	100MB of free disk space
	ACTIVATION	Working internet connection and a Razer ID

“Invalidating Beats.” Razer’s installer for Surround sets some pretty high expectations for itself from the start. In a nutshell, what Razer has done is take the software bundled with the Megalodon and repackaged it into Synapse 2.0. Razer Surround then enables virtual 7.1 surround sound from any audio device connected to your computer.

Surround takes the audio you hear and “widens” it, giving you the impression that some sounds are close and others far away. Some other complex algorithms calculate the approximate position and height of sounds as well. It doesn’t widen any content that only has stereo sound, so it’s better suited for gaming or listening to high-quality media. There are extras for Pro owners like bass boost, an equaliser and options for clearer voice comms.

Being deaf in one ear I didn’t think it would benefit me, but I was wrong. There was an improvement in my ability to locate sounds around me in most games, but others like *Hawken* don’t play well with it and ended up over-boosting or mixing sounds together, taking away any improvements. My family also tried it out and noticed some exaggerated crosstalk in a few games, although they all agreed that sound was much better than my normal audio drivers.

One issue that I did run into is that Surround is entirely CPU-driven. This isn’t a problem for my triple-core CPU, but weaker single and dual-core processors are probably going to chug on this while also running a game.

It doesn’t entirely make up for not having nice, expensive headphones but Razer’s done a great job making Surround as unrestrictive as possible. It even makes gaming on a laptop that much more tolerable! Pick up the free version, calibrate it for yourself and buy a Pro licence if you like what you hear.

NAG

- Wesley Fick



8

Razer’s offering a very smart software solution to improve your audio experience, but don’t use R100-ish crappy headphones with it.

PLUS / Works with almost any audio device / Free version gives you the same basic 7.1 boost / Custom auto-tunes for Razer USB headsets

MINUS / Doesn’t work for all games / Needs a hotkey to turn off Surround when listening to stereo-only content

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THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE



Bigben Interactive “Union Jack” TD79 Turntable

Website / www.bigben.eu

RRP / R2,799 Supplier / Apex Interactive

If your parents or grandparents (or one of your hipster friends, or that creepy old guy down the road) are constantly talking about the “good old days” while flipping through their grand stack of vintage vinyl records and lamenting the fact that their last good turntable stopped working back in the ‘80s and they’ve not been able to listen to any decent music since because the stuff these damn kids listen to these days is simply dreadful, perhaps consider returning a bit of a twinkle to their wistful eyes by gifting them the TD79 turntable/media player from Bigben Interactive. It’ll do things to their old records and CDs that’ll make their heads explode.

VEGAS BABY!

Did we say Vegas? We actually meant London. Sorry. If you’re obsessed with all things Union Jack and your room already looks like an English vagrant vomited over all your stuff, then the TD79 will be right at home in between your gold-framed photo of the queen and that nude painted portrait of Paul McCartney hugging a block of cheddar cheese.

YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND

As you’ve probably guessed based on the intro paragraph, what sets the TD79 apart from other modern music players is the built-in turntable. So not only can it play MP3s and CDs, but it’ll play old vinyl records as well. The table’s got three speed settings: 33, 45 and 78 RPM.

MEMORIES MADE NEW

Not only will you be able to play your old records, but the TD79 will also encode those records as MP3s so that you can store them digitally. It’ll similarly convert the content of your CDs – which is a godsend, because everyone knows computers are difficult.

CHOICES, CHOICES

Digital music can be accessed via USB 2.0 or SD/MMC card. There’s a 3.5mm headphone jack should you need it, and the built-in AM/FM radio is a nice touch. It would’ve been shiny if there was Bluetooth support, so you could stream music from your mobile devices – but alas, there is none.

TECHNICAL

TURNTABLE

Three speeds (33/45/78 RPM)

CONNECTIVITY

USB 2.0 / SD/MMC card reader / 3.5mm headphone jack

OTHER FEATURES

Built-in AM/FM radio / CD/MP3 player / Encodes turntable and CD audio / Remote control

SUMMARY

PROS

- Multifunctional
- Cool design

CONS

- Does it have to be all... Union Jack-y?
- No Bluetooth

ALTERNATIVES

- Your grandparents’ old turntable
- Every other audio player, ever

MOSH *pit*

This month's hot list of cool stuff and everything else you simply must have. Well, almost everything.

► SOUNDCAST MELODY

- **Supplier** / HFX Systems
- **Website** / www.hfxsystems.co.za
- **RRP** / R7,590

Soundcast's Melody aims to deliver portable audio in an attractively robust package. You're able to stream audio to the Melody from your mobile devices via Bluetooth 3.0, or you can use the bundled 3.5mm audio jack to make the magic happen. It's able to project your music in a 360-degree arc all around the Melody, and it's water resistant and solidly built, so you can be sure it can take a beating if one of your pool parties gets a bit out of hand.

The Melody's rechargeable battery will get you around 20 hours of use per charge. You'll find playback and volume controls along the top of the unit, so that you can alter the audio without needing to access the device from which it's being streamed. It also comes bundled with a 12-volt cigarette lighter adapter for your car, so that you can charge the speaker on the go. To top it all off, there's a convenient carry handle for maximum portability.



► CRUCIAL MX100 512GB

- **Supplier** / Syntech
- **Website** / www.syntech.co.za
- **RRP** / R3,350

Now that SSD prices are finally getting closer to something that a sane person would consider, it's a great time to look at getting a drive that can seriously cope with your collection of games. After all, SSDs won't just improve your operating system performance, but will usually reduce loading times in-game by a significant margin.

The Crucial MX100 is no slouch when it comes to performance, with rated maximum read/write speeds of 550/500MB per second for sequential reads.





➤ HUAWEI ASCEND P7

- ➊ Supplier / Huawei
- ➋ Website / www.huawei.com/za/
- ➌ RRP / R6,699

Huawei has the habit of (sometimes surprisingly) impressing us with their phones, and the P7 is no different. Like its smaller sibling, the P6 (which we reviewed exactly one year ago), the P7 runs a near-stock version of Android 4.4.2 that keeps the frills to a minimum.

Powering the massive 5" full HD display is a very capable quad-core 1.8GHz CPU that's teamed up with 2GB RAM and the Mali-450MP4 to ensure smooth performance throughout both the operating system and while in games and apps. The package is completed with great features like Gorilla Glass protecting the display, and an impressive 13MP rear camera.

➤ SONY WALKMAN NWZ-WH303/WH505 3-IN-1 HEADPHONES

- ➊ Supplier / Sony
- ➋ Website / www.sony.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R2,499

Oh wow, the Walkman. We can't hear the name without our minds conjuring images of the '80s, when all the cool kids would have this ridiculous miniature (but massive by today's standards) CD player strapped to their pants. Naturally, the Walkman brand has evolved with technology over the years, and now we've got this excellent 3-in-1 headset – which mercifully appears far more ordinary than a music-playing UFO hanging from your waist.

These wireless headphones work in three ways: as a regular headset, as a portable speaker set, and as a portable MP3 player. Tap a button and the sound will divert to a set of outward-facing speakers (the ear cups swivel so that they'll rest comfortably against your collarbone when the set's around your neck), so you can easily listen to music with friends. You can also connect the WH303/WH505 to external devices, so you can access the media you've got stored on them however you'd like.

The WH303 is the smaller, cheaper set, with 4GB of storage space, 30mm neodymium driver units and a frequency range of 30Hz-20,000Hz. The WH505 has 16GB storage, 40mm drivers and frequency response of 5Hz-25,000Hz. Both sets feature sound enhancement options that change the

listening experience at the touch of a button. They promise around 20 hours of use off a single charge, and boast a quick-charge feature that'll get you 60 minutes of use off of a quick three-minute charge.



► PLANET STEAM

- 1 Supplier / AWX
- 2 Website / www.awx.co.za
- 3 RRP / R730

If you're a very serious board game player and need a board game that complements your seriousness, then this is the one for you. Having a penchant for economics and brassware wouldn't hurt, either.

Planet Steam is a game in which you assume the role of an entrepreneur who flies around a steampunk world in an airship (obviously), extracting, buying and selling resources in the attempt to outdo your competitors and have the most wealth by the end of the game. There's no combat to speak of, but the term hostile takeover

certainly has plenty of meaning here.

Everything in the box is presented in the highest of quality, from the chunky game board to the 300+ cardboard pieces and the cool little plastic pieces that represent how the player extracts resources from the game world. The rule book, for a 26-page behemoth, does an excellent job of explaining the vast rules in a way that anyone with a reasonable attention span could understand, and there are plenty of illustrations to show you the finer points if you're struggling.



► NES30 GAME CONTROLLER

- 1 Supplier / Wicked Warrior
- 2 Website / www.wickedwarrior.co.za
- 3 RRP / R800

Even though we never had the original NES in this country, it's not difficult to recognise the iconic design that this Bluetooth controller so blatantly rips off. Yes, it's not an original, but it looks really neat so we'll let it slide. Also, this controller throws in a couple of shoulder buttons for added compatibility with modern games.

Installation is a snap: just plug in a USB cable or sync with

your Bluetooth adapter, and let Windows take care of the rest (the cable also charges the controller's batteries). Setting up on a mobile phone requires a couple of steps but it's still pretty easy, and there's nothing quite like playing supported mobile games with a physical controller.

Pricy, sure, but this is too cool to pass up.

► STRONTIUM MICRO SDXC UHS-1 CARD 64GB

- 1 Supplier / Kaira Technologies
- 2 Website / www.kairaglobal.co.za
- 3 RRP / R1,049

If you're looking for a high performance UHS I memory card for your Android smartphone or tablet, then the Strontium Nitro Plus is a worthwhile consideration. Features include read and write speeds of up to 80/60 MB/s, and it also comes with a free backup app called MyBackup Pro.

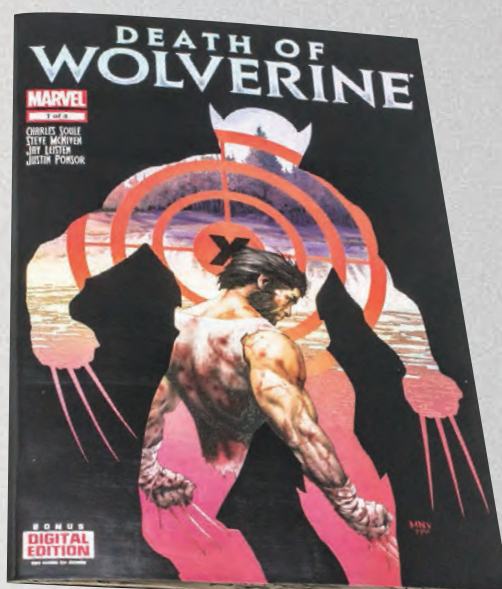


➤ FUTURES END: SWAMP THING

- ➊ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ➋ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R60

Futures End is a spin-off series from DC's main stable that takes us into the (generally awful) futures of some of their most famous characters. And to mark the third year anniversary of DC's generally excellent *The New 52* series, every series currently running will receive a one-shot special issue that takes their characters five years into the future. Every one of these issues has a fancy lenticular 3D cover (and back cover ad, which is a nice touch) that you'll probably spend as much time staring at as you spend reading the book.

This particular issue features everyone's favourite moss-covered superhero, and it's weird, dark and delightfully strange. Featuring a poetic narrative and some crazy art to bolster this adventure, Swamp Thing is just creepy enough to be thoughtful but still somehow safely within the realm of comic book acceptability.



➤ DEATH OF WOLVERINE #1

- ➊ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ➋ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R69

You read that right: this is Logan's last trip to the dog park, and he's clearly not happy about it. This first issue starts off gritty and keeps on going in that direction. For such a short read it's packed remarkably well with depth and suspense, and we can't wait to see where it's headed.

The art is that classic Marvel level of quality. It's dark and line-heavy, and the style works perfectly for this subject matter. About half of the pages are dedicated to a making of, and while it's always nice to peer inside the creation of high-level comics like this, it would've been ever better to have those pages filled with more story. Regardless, this is an excellent beginning to this four-shot series.

➤ THE FLASH VOLUME 1: MOVE FORWARD

- ➊ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ➋ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R229

We always thought that The Flash was just a dude who ran really fast and had a passion for dressing like a piece of rock candy, but it turns out that there's a lot more under the hood than just a can or two of Red Bull. The Flash taps into something called the Speed Force, and in this collection he discovers that there's a lot more to this handy trick than he first suspected.

Move Forward does an excellent job of dropping the reader in the middle of some interesting happenings but ensures that newcomers are well looked after, as long as they can pay attention. The story is a solid mix of human drama and action (somewhat surprisingly so), and the painterly style of the art goes a long way to raise the maturity level of the whole package. A good read if you want something slightly more brainy than the usual mainstream stuff.



► **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES BEANIE BALLZ**

- ① Supplier / AWX
- ② Website / www.awx.co.za
- ③ RRP / R95 (each)

These are 12cm (diameter) green fluffy balls that look like the Ninja Turtles. They don't contain any hard edges so you can safely toss them at friends and associates. They do possess some magical properties however: Dane caught one with one hand (thought an impossible task) and when he threw it back it hit Michael's hand and landed exactly where he picked it up from off his desk. It was amazing, but truthfully you had to be there to really understand. They've got a nice weight to them and look like they could survive a hand wash and a trip to the washing line. Currently there's no Splinter, April or Shredder in this batch so they might be released later along with The Foot slippers.



► **MARVEL ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN CREEPEEZ: WALL-CRAWLER SPIDER-MAN**

- ① Supplier / AWX
- ② Website / www.awx.co.za
- ③ RRP / R95

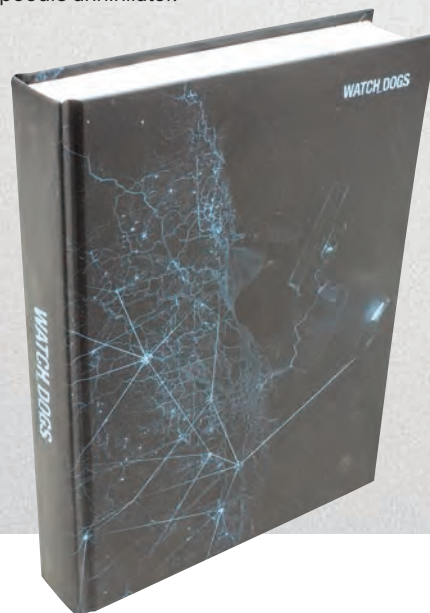
This is a smart use for a classic toy. What better character to stick, flop and crawl down your non-porous vertical surface? It's fun at parties and even by yourself in your room if you have no friends. If this describes you then perhaps this is a good time to turn off your Dancing with Miley exercise series and get out there and meet some new people.



► **WATCH_DOGS COLLECTOR'S EDITION OFFICIAL STRATEGY GUIDE (HC)**

- ① Supplier / AWX
- ② Website / www.awx.co.za
- ③ RRP / R620

In a world with Google standing ready to solve dumb questions about playing games, a 560 page hardcover game guide seems a little odd and frivolous. For the fanatical collector, it does have everything you need for completing the game and getting all the points, badges and sparkles. There's an online updated guide included, bonus pages of backstory and lore and if you're in a pinch it can even double as a handy mouse/cockroach/spider/small poodle annihilator.





▶ **MARVEL NOW!** **KOTOBUKIYA HAWKEYE** **AVENGERS ARTFX+ STATUE**

- ❶ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ❷ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ❸ RRP / R899

Hawkeye stands around 21cm tall and includes six arrows with sharp little points. Too bad you can't fire them into your friend's eyeballs – sadly they're just for show. The statue is well made, well painted and well put together. The real question is just how much of a fan are you of Hawkeye. If you've got the whole Avengers set then this statue is a must but otherwise it's only for dedicated Hawkeye fans. It also ships with a magnetic base and a few simple instructions for fitting the bow and arrows together.

▶ **MARVEL GUARDIANS OF** **THE GALAXY KOTOBUKIYA** **ROCKET RACCOON &** **GROOT ARTFX+ STATUE**

- ❶ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ❷ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ❸ RRP / R899

This beauty stands 13.5cm tall and costs R899. That's basically all you need to know to make a call on this quick to market statue from the stellar, amazing, stunning and brilliant movie *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Considering these two are fan favourites they were first out the blocks. The detailing (especially Rocket's weapon and Groot's face) and colouring is well above standard and the statue has a decent weighty feel to it. If you're not too concerned about the pricing here then this will look great on your desk.



GG

by Tarryn van der Byl

LEO: Stealth-based attacks may prove fatal this month. Beware of cloaked enemies wearing red hats.



EXPOSED: THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT GAMES JOURNALISM

You've probably already heard about #GamerGate, but if you've only just arrived back on the planet from an interstellar trip or something and managed to miss out on the controversy... maybe you should have stayed out there in space, for your own sanity. Because you're here now, though, this is the crib notes version – basically, indie developer Zoe Quinn's ex-boyfriend Eron Gjoni wrote a blog post alleging that she had cheated on him with Kotaku gaming journalist Nathan Grayson.

What should have been an entirely inconsequential non-event instantly relegated to the Archives of Stuff That Actually Totally Doesn't Matter (or, perhaps more appropriately, the plot of a straight-to-TV high school drama), Zoe Quinn's sex life somehow became ground zero for the UNMASKING OF A SCANDALOUS CONSPIRACY and something about ETHICS and BIAS. Or, difficult words that most of the people involved didn't look up in a dictionary, because – all lurid indictments about cash for positive

review scores and lizard people secretly controlling the weather notwithstanding – the only thing Nathan Grayson ever wrote about Zoe Quinn was a single news article, published when the two were barely acquaintances. I mean, anybody could look this up.

But humdrum reality is not admissible evidence in this case, apparently, and Zoe's "crimes" were condemned to an interminable torrent of rape and death threats on social media (obviously)¹, as the self-appointed inquisitors then turned to the press, demanding to know why this very important news was not being featured on major gaming websites.

Just to clarify, this "very important news" – having nothing whatsoever to do with any conspiracy or breach in ethics or bias² – was actually mostly just a lot of tabloid-level speculation about who Zoe Quinn might or might not have had sex with. Which, in fact, is not news with any relevance to gamers, or anybody else who isn't Zoe Quinn or her previous partners.

But somehow, the gaming press's subsequent failure to repeat the gossip with bold red headlines and a public burning in the town square only constitutes more evidence of corruption. That's more evidence of the same vaguely defined corruption that was already debunked, but don't let that stop anybody – we've got another reason why your favourite game didn't get exactly the score you thought it deserved, plus leaked photos of some Z-list celebrity in a bikini (or whatever).

Okay, but seriously, here's the real "shocking truth" about the gaming press – there isn't one. Think about it for a moment. Edward Snowden ratted out the National Security Agency for their covert global surveillance programs, incurring the vengeful wrath of the entire US treason machine, but nobody is risking their supply of free stickers³ to come clean about a deal with this week's most hated publisher/developer/feeeemale for article space on a website? Really? Yeah. No. **NAG**

- 1 Interestingly, Grayson was not subject to the same abuse. But no, we don't have a problem with misogyny in the gaming community.
- 2 And remember, it's only biased when it's different to your own biases.
- 3 I don't even get free stickers.

EXTRA LIFE

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